

Henry Suso

LITTLE BOOK
OF ETERNAL
WISDOM

And

LITTLE BOOK
OF TRUTH



Translated with an introduction & notes

by

JAMES M. CLARK

HARPER & BROTHERS

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LITTLE BOOK OF ETERNAL WISDOM

And

LITTLE BOOK OF TRUTH

by HENRY SUSO

Henry Suso, the 14th century Dominican and German mystic, is well known to those versed in devotional literature. The present volume comprises two of his major works which are complementary to each other.

LITTLE BOOK OF ETERNAL WISDOM shows us Suso the poet, with his joy in the beauty of nature, his ecstatic worship of God, the creator of nature. At the same time we see him as the ascetic and contemplative, following Christ on the sorrowful way of the cross. It is undoubtedly Suso's greatest work and was read extensively in the Middle Ages, being second in popularity in Germany only to the *Imitation of Christ* and the writings of St. Bernard. Its main theme is the attainment of union with God by the Sorrowful Way and reveals his understanding of the meaning and mysterious beauty of suffering. Suso also throws much light on some of the eternal problems of religion: How is it that God, who is love, can appear to be angry? Why does He allow His friends to suffer so much in this life? What is the meaning of suffering?

(continued on back flap)

Richard D. Hunt, S.S.



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Little Book of Eternal Wisdom
and
Little Book of Truth

CLASSICS OF THE CONTEMPLATIVE LIFE

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HENRY SUSO

Little Book of Eternal Wisdom
and
Little Book of Truth

*Translated with an Introduction
and Notes
by*

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Introduction

'There was once a Preacher in Germany, and he was a Swabian by birth.' With these words begins the famous biography, the joint work of the friar and his spiritual friend, Elsbeth Stagel. Suso was the humblest and most modest of men, but, when he claims to be a Swabian, we detect an accent of pride. He had good reason to be proud of his birthplace and his lineage.

The Duchy of Swabia stretched from Baden in the north to the Italian frontier, from Strasbourg to Ulm. Under the Hohenstaufen dynasty, six of whose members held the joint titles of Duke of Swabia and Holy Roman Emperor, or King of Germany, it had reached the culminating point of its prestige. It was the breeding-ground of rulers, of the Welfs, the Habsburgs and the Hohenzollerns. After the royal line died out in 1268 the Duchy disintegrated as a political unit, but in Suso's day it still remained a linguistic and cultural whole, held together by a common form of speech, which survives in the dialects of Southern Germany and Switzerland. The memories of the past were still vivid in tradition and poetry in the fourteenth century.

Rich as it was in military prowess and administrative talent, Swabia was also the home of poetry and music. It had its lyric and epic poets, its *Minnesinger* and knightly writers of romance; their names stand high in the story of medieval literature. Nowhere else in the Empire did these literary traditions persist so long, and nowhere else were they so fruitful as in the region surrounding the Lake of Constance. Its scenic beauty, with its forests and fertile valleys in the north and the mighty Alpine chain in the south, formed a fitting background for the poet of the German mystics, as Suso has so often been termed. The love of nature is one of the salient traits of his writings.

Heinrich von Berg, for that was the original name of the friar, was a nobleman by birth.¹ He inherited the outlook and ideals of chivalry. The scion of a long line of soldiers, he aspired to be a soldier of Christ. His martial ancestors and his contemporaries suffered hunger, thirst and wounds without complaint. Suso suffered in the service of his heavenly Lord as they did in that of their earthly king. Their example gave him the strength to persist in monastic austerities of unimaginable severity, and to bear every kind of hardship, including illness, calumny and persecution, with patience and fortitude. His mortifications of the flesh are recorded in the *Life*, not without a little pardonable exaggeration or literary embellishment on the part of Elsbeth Stagel. At the same time, as the heir of the *Minnesinger* he sang the praises, not of an earthly lady, but of Eternal Wisdom and the Virgin Mary.

From his mother he inherited his religious nature, his sensitivity, his ready sympathy with others. From her he learnt the meaning and the mysterious beauty of suffering. He was profoundly conscious of his debt to her, and it was in her honour that he assumed her family name of Suso, probably soon after her death, and while he was a student at Cologne.

The age in which Suso lived was full of war and strife, of great natural calamities, such as plagues, famines and even earthquakes. The struggle between Pope and Emperor, and the 'Babylonian captivity' of the Pope still further strengthened the sense of insecurity, the apprehension of impending evil. It was widely believed that the end of the world was approaching. The age of faith was over. Suso complained of the coolness of hearts and contrasted it with the fervour of earlier days.² No doubt moralists are inclined to exaggerate, but even when full allowance has been made for this tendency, the fact remains that in Germany the fourteenth century was an age of decadence. It is not without justice that Huizinga speaks of the 'waning of the Middle Ages'. The Mendicant movement had lost its initial impulse and not yet felt the impact of reform. No longer were

¹ For a full account of Suso's life see J. M. Clark, *The Great German Mystics*, pp. 54-60, Oxford, 1949.

² *Horologium Sapientias*, ed. Joseph Strange, p. 9.

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the schools of the friars famous seats of learning. The great Thomist tradition of philosophy and theology was moribund. The friaries were rarely places of devotion, but too often centres of worldliness. The few remaining spiritually-minded friars and nuns lived in their convents almost in isolation.

Among them was Suso, who lived the life of a recluse in his convent at Constance. He had a deep sense of vocation for the religious life, but his companions did not share his ideals. They scoffed and sneered at the unworldly dreamer, who was therefore driven back on himself. At Cologne he had had a living model to follow in the person of his beloved teacher Eckhart, but at Constance he had no one. What he could not find in the society of his contemporaries he sought in devotional reading and meditation.

The *Constitutions* of the Dominican Order provided him with clear, simple precepts which he followed conscientiously. He was strongly drawn to Saint Arsenius and the other Desert Fathers, those anchorite monks of Egypt who lived in the fourth and fifth centuries and were the pioneers of monasticism. Like other 'spiritual' friars, Suso felt that it was necessary to go back to the foundations of conventual life, to its origins, to find there true religion in its strength and purity. In order to fix in his memory the precepts of the Fathers, Suso had typical quotations from their writings painted on the walls of his cell. He imitated their behaviour and practised the same harsh bodily austerities as they had done.

This period of monastic seclusion and severe mortification was, however, not the whole of Suso's life. It was but a preparation for his pastoral activities, which were to carry him far and wide on his errands of mercy. He did not aspire to teach the ignorant. 'The earth is already full of the knowledge of the Lord.' But he strove 'to kindle afresh the extinguished (hearts), to inflame the old ones, move the lukewarm, incite the irreligious to devotion, and arouse to virtuous vigilance those who sleep the slumber of carelessness'.¹

Of all the German mystics of the Middle Ages Suso is the one we know best. The great figure of Eckhart is still something of

¹ *Horologium Sapientiae*, ed. Joseph Strange, p. 9.

a mystery to us. The writings that go under his name, whether genuine or spurious, are so full of fervour and enthusiasm, and yet so strangely impersonal. How little there is that really reveals the man, as we should like to know him! How different is the case with Suso, his devoted disciple! We have his sermons, his letters, his *Life*, his devotional writings. From his works we can build up a complete picture of the man. We see his humility, his modesty, his deep insight into the springs of human conduct, not only in its frailty, but also in its strength, his tenderness and sympathy for all who suffer, his charity, his sincerity, and his spirituality. However much he tries to efface himself, he reveals himself continually.

As a man and as a writer, Suso was completely free from vanity. He did not consider his best work to be written by his own unaided efforts, but by Divine inspiration. Any faults to be found in his writings were due, as he believed, to his own shortcomings; anything good came from the Giver of every good and perfect gift. Suso regarded himself as the unworthy vehicle of spiritual teaching. His doctrines were not his own invention; they were partly given to him direct from God, and partly indirectly, being the common possession of Christendom, through the gift of the Holy Spirit, through the Bible and the Doctors of the Church. Hence he claimed no credit for them, and would have repudiated any suggestion that he was a great writer.

At the same time he had a profound sense of vocation. He felt that he had a mission to perform to his own penitents, and beyond them to a wider circle of readers extending from the north of Switzerland to the Lower Rhine. He had a responsibility to them, and conceived it his duty to prevent any abridgment or mutilation of his words. Some careless scribes had ill-treated his writings, and to prevent this from happening after his death, he set to work towards the end of his life to prepare an authentic edition. It is not unusual to find in a medieval manuscript a curse on any copyist who should change the meaning of the text. Suso was not a man who readily cursed anyone, but at the end of *The Little Book of Eternal Wisdom* we find a threat of this kind.¹

¹ See below, p. 169.

Both the works here presented in English translation are contained in the *Exemplar*, that is, the revised or authentic version of Suso's writings. Their genuineness has never been questioned, and they are found in several good and early manuscripts. They are both written in dialogue form, but the technique of dialogue is not the same in one as in the other. In *The Little Book of Truth* this literary form is not fully developed. The matter tends to be divided into question and answer in a mechanical way. As in a school book, the dialogue is just a technical device, implying little psychological differentiation.

In *The Little Book of Wisdom*, however, the dialogue is more flexible, more imaginative, more truly dramatic. There are two points of view, two personalities, as it were, at grips with each other. Not that the arrangement is rigidly logical. The speakers tend to fall out of their roles at times: their personalities are not very sharply defined. Eternal Wisdom is at first a woman, the personification of Wisdom, the spouse of the soul, as in the Wisdom books of the Old Testament. Later, Eternal Wisdom represents Christ. Similarly, the Servant is not always Suso himself. At times, as Suso himself tells us,¹ the Servant is a sinner, at times a human soul in general, at times the author of the book in person.

The dialogue form was not invented by Suso. It already existed in Boethius' *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, and was not uncommon in medieval textbooks. But it corresponded to Suso's natural way of thinking; it was part and parcel of his style. His private meditations often took the form of an imaginary conversation. He would apostrophize God, and hear in his own mind the Divine reply. We see in the *Life* his fondness for personification, his tendency to dramatize a story. Thus he personifies the voice of conscience and also that of temptation.² A voice within him calls him to his duty and another voice, that of the tempter, tries to lead him astray.

So great was the popularity and the diffusion of Suso's writings that the dialogue form, already familiar, became extremely common. It became the characteristic form of the literature

¹ See below, p. 44.

² *Life*, p. 17. Bihlmeyer, *Heinrich Seuse, Deutsche Schriften*, pp. 8-9.

associated with the Friends of God. Subsequent writers, such as the Franciscan Marquard of Lindau, used it with skill.

The Little Book of Eternal Wisdom is undoubtedly Suso's greatest work. It was read very extensively in the Middle Ages in Germany and was inferior only to the *Imitation of Christ* and the writings of Saint Bernard in popularity. The Latin version was well known in England, and there are many manuscripts of it in our libraries. The original German text was written, so its author tells us, in simple language for simple folk. The phrase 'simple language' is not to be taken too literally. Suso was a poet and his exuberant imagination occasionally carried him away. But it is a work that arose quite naturally out of his pastoral activities: devotional reading for his penitents and spiritual friends, suitable for reading aloud at meal-times in convents, or for private use.

Suso tells us that he was ordered in a vision to devise a hundred meditations on the Passion of Christ. These meditations form the central core of the book and are briefly summarized at the end. Some scholars think that in its original form the book consisted of nothing but the Hundred Meditations, and that the rest was added later. In another vision Suso was given a thread and told to thread a needle with it. The thread had three strands: the first two were very thin, the third was a little thicker. This is an allegory of the threefold construction of *The Little Book of Eternal Wisdom*.

The first part deals with the Passion of Christ, which Suso retraces, step by step, adding to it the sorrows of the Virgin Mary. Some of the eternal problems of religion are interwoven in the story: how is it that God, who is love, can appear to be angry? Why does He allow His friends to suffer so much in this life? What is the meaning of suffering? The second part tells us how to die, how to lead the spiritual life, how to receive the Sacrament, and how to praise God at all times. The third part consists of a summary of the Hundred Meditations.

The Little Book of Eternal Wisdom has often been adversely criticized because of the emphasis laid on the physical sufferings of Christ. Suso has been accused of morbidity, and indeed there are passages in the book that would repel the average reader.

It is, however, important to consider Suso's motives for writing in this strain. By meditating on Christ's Passion he believed that he could, as it were, share in the sorrow and pain of his crucified Lord, thus completing His Passion. Christ's sufferings did not cease at Golgotha. They are in some sense eternal, since man continues to sin and will continue to do so. Those who walk with Him on the Sorrowful Way may hope both to share His pain and also to participate in His redemptive work. Moreover, by facing bravely the sufferings of this world, Suso reached a state in which pain and death no longer had any terrors for him. He had attained inner harmony and peace.¹

A French scholar² speaks of Suso's 'religion de souffrance'. This is rather misleading, since for Suso suffering was always a means, and never an end. He accepted it as a sad necessity, and ultimately found in it 'infinite nobility'. The thirteenth chapter of *The Little Book of Eternal Wisdom* contains one of the most beautiful and most moving passages ever written on the problem of pain. The conclusion is summed up in the words: 'Nothing is more bitter than suffering; nothing gives more joy than to have suffered.'

In the Prologue of *The Little Book of Eternal Wisdom* Suso relates that he tells the story in German because it was given to him in that language. He was convinced that it was given to him by Divine inspiration. At one point a blank space was left and the author could not fill it in until by God's help the necessary inspiration was forthcoming.

In another passage³ Suso tells us that he wrote *The Little Book of Eternal Wisdom* in German and in Latin. The Latin version is evidently the *Horologium Sapientiae*, i.e. 'Clock of Wisdom', so called because it is divided up into twenty-four sections, corresponding to the hours of the day. Suso saw in a vision a very beautiful clock adorned with roses and with many cymbals, emitting a 'sweet and heavenly sound'.⁴

¹ A similar thought is developed with reference to an English mystic by R. H. Thouless, *The Lady Juliana, A Psychological Study*, pp. 59-61, London (S.P.C.K.), 1924.

² J.-A. Bizet, *Henri Suso*, p. 103, Paris, 1946.

³ *Life*, p. 20. Bihlmeyer, op. cit., p. 11.

⁴ Ed. Joseph Strange, pp. 9-10.

In the prologue of this work we are told that it is based on an 'original'. The usual interpretation is that this original is the German *Little Book of Eternal Wisdom*, which Suso translated into Latin with a view to submitting it to Hugo de Vaucemain, the General of the Dominican Order, who being a Frenchman probably knew no German. Some passages in the two works correspond so closely that it would not be improper to speak of a translation, but other passages differ widely from each other. It has been pointed out that 'original' does not necessarily imply a work in another language. Some scholars go so far as to maintain that the *Horologium* was the original work and that the *Little Book of Eternal Wisdom* was partly translated from it with many changes, omissions and interpolations.¹

As the issue is still undecided, it might be as well to discuss the matter in some detail. About 1328 Suso returned from Cologne to his own friary at Constance. For a time he seems to have taught as lector in the school. Later he was entrusted with the spiritual care of neighbouring nunneries, which meant the end of his monastic seclusion. There are good grounds for thinking that the *Horologium* was written in 1334,² about the time when Suso abandoned his life of asceticism and seclusion and began his pastoral work.

In the twenty-second chapter of *The Little Book of Eternal Wisdom* there is a reference to the large number of persons who died sudden deaths in towns and monasteries. This is generally understood to refer to the plague of 1328, mentioned by the chronicler Johann von Winterthur.³ It is therefore not unreasonable to suppose that *The Little Book of Eternal Wisdom* was written first, and was followed after an interval of some six years by the *Horologium*. This makes the mention of the 'original' in the Prologue of the *Horologium* perfectly clear. No other theory put forward fits the known facts so well.

There are some difficulties about the precise relationship be-

¹ This view was first stated by Quétif and Echard, *Scriptores Ordinis Praedicatorum*, i, 654-5, Paris, 1719-21.

² Bihlmeyer, *op. cit.*, p. 109.

³ Monsignor Gröber's attempt to prove that *The Little Book of Eternal Wisdom* was written after the *Horologium*, and about 1348, is ingenious, but not convincing.

tween the two works. Many passages in the Latin version are more detailed than the corresponding portions of the German book. Thus, the sixth chapter of the former describes a ruined city.¹ In the Latin work we are told why it is in ruins: this was due to the neglect of the inhabitants. The German book tells us that it is inhabited by beast-like men; the Latin one adds details: they are like sea-monsters with human heads. Possibly Suso was thinking of seals or sea-lions. Here, as elsewhere, the *Horologium* makes the meaning clearer and more precise. Was an original German passage paraphrased and expanded in a Latin translation, or are we to assume that in such passages the German is an abridged version of the Latin? The former view strikes me as the more likely one. Suso, like his contemporaries, thought and wrote much more clearly in Latin than in the vernacular.

The fortieth year was often regarded as an important turning point in the religious life. But whether or not *The Little Book of Eternal Wisdom* was written at this stage in Suso's life is difficult to decide. If he was born about 1295, which seems probable, it is by no means certain that he wrote the book at the age of forty. The theory that he was born in 1300 is based on a number of assumptions, such as that Eckhart died in 1327, for which there is not sufficient evidence.²

As far as I am able to ascertain, *The Little Book of Truth* has never yet been translated into English. This is not surprising. As compared with the *Life* and *The Little Book of Eternal Wisdom*, this short treatise has never been well known or popular. It is extremely difficult to understand because of its conciseness and its strange vocabulary. Denifle rightly called it 'the most obscure book in German mysticism'.³ But from the point of view of the history of medieval thought it is an important document, and in addition it completes the picture of Suso the mystic.

¹ *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores Rerum Germanicarum*, N.S. iii, p. 115, Berlin, 1924.

² See J. M. Clark, *The Great German Mystics*, p. 11.

³ *Die deutschen Schriften des seligen Heinrich Seuse*, p. xxv, Munich, 1880.

The Little Book of Truth is usually regarded as a product of its author's youth, written during his student days at Cologne, or shortly after his return to Constance. It is associated with the controversies that accompanied Eckhart's trial, and is hence thought to be the work of a youthful theologian, accustomed to argue about theological questions, who at the same time is fired with enthusiasm for mystical experiences. It does not necessarily follow that it was written in its present form during Suso's early years. It may have been revised, or drastically curtailed, at the time when Suso was preparing the *Exemplar*. In the latter it follows *The Little Book of Eternal Wisdom*, but the order is not to be considered as chronological. It has been suggested, and the suggestion is quite plausible, that in his serene old age, when his reputation was firmly established, and the favour of the authorities of his Order was assured, Suso felt free to bring this youthful work out of the obscurity in which it had been kept for so long. The polemics that were aroused by Eckhart's fall had long since subsided; his condemnation was but a memory.

There is much to be said for the view that it was an early work, though the style is not dissimilar from that of the last four chapters of the *Life*, in which the same kind of theological problems are discussed. But *The Little Book of Truth* is not the product of an immature mind. As regards chronology it may be early, but it is not youthful. The writer has been trained in theology and philosophy, and he has made some progress on the mystic way. He is writing of things that he knows, not merely theoretically, but also through actual experience.

The Little Book of Truth attempts to find an intellectual formulation for some of the profoundest mysteries of the religious life. It would, however, be wrong to describe it as a text-book of speculative mysticism. Suso never wrote, or even tried to write, a text-book. This work is by no means a complete account of the subject, and it is not methodical in its approach. It centres round one main theme: the pursuit of true abandonment, that is, the abandonment of self. It is contrasted with false abandonment, such as was current among the Beghards and Brethren of the Free Spirit, who had dangerous opinions and practices.

True abandonment leads to the mystic union, which is also discussed, though not exhaustively. In the first five chapters there is a dialogue between the Servant (Suso) and Truth, but in the fifth it is the Servant who asks the questions and a mysterious 'Wild Man' who answers him, and is corrected by him. The 'Wild Man' is a personification of certain heresies. He quotes Eckhart in support of his anti-social and immoral doctrines.

While attacking and exposing false mystics, Suso gives an unsystematic, but extremely able exposition of true mystical theology. His orthodoxy was unimpeachable: if he ever deviated by a hair's breadth from strict Thomist doctrine, he did so unwittingly. It is, therefore, hardly credible that the book was written in its original form after Eckhart's condemnation in 1329. It is much more likely that it was a product of the stormy days of 1326-7 when Eckhart was openly denounced and put to his trial. The book testifies to Suso's courage and loyalty: to his courage, because he was taking the part of a man who had been cited before the Inquisition, and who had many powerful enemies; to his loyalty, because he was pleading the cause of one who had no doubt already been deserted by many of his former friends. The sixth chapter of *The Little Book of Truth* is not exactly an apology for Eckhart, but rather a very skilful attempt to show that even the Master's most daring sayings were capable of an orthodox interpretation, and that they had been unfairly distorted or wilfully misunderstood by lawless men.

Suso never speaks of Eckhart without the deepest respect. He calls him 'the saintly master', 'the blessed master'. His doctrine is described as 'sweet' and 'sublime'. But Suso points out that this doctrine, though good in itself, is easily misunderstood by simple and untrained minds. He tactfully warns Elsbeth Stagel to exercise caution: 'Thou shouldst not delight in them (Eckhart's writings) overmuch, for in this way thou mayst easily stray into pernicious error. True blessedness does not consist in fair words, but in fair deeds.'¹ He modestly asserts that Eckhart's writings are far superior to his own in literary beauty and grace, but finds it incumbent upon him to point out the dangers inherent in Eckhart's doctrines.

¹ *Life*, p. 98. Bihlmeyer, op. cit., p. 97.

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He mentions two chief objections to these teachings: first, the requisite distinctness is lacking; the phraseology lends itself to misinterpretation. Eckhart did not pay sufficient attention to the need for precisely accurate use of theological terminology. Secondly, the words used are often ambiguous, and may be understood either in a physical or a spiritual sense. Eckhart naturally meant them in the spiritual sense, but his readers and hearers did not all share his purity of mind, just as some modern readers are much more sensual than many medieval mystics and read their own sensuality into mystical writings. A theological writer should guard against the mere possibility of ambiguity in individual phrases, or in the whole trend of a work. Entire passages in Eckhart might be, and actually were, wrongly understood. In short, Suso maintained that only a trained theologian could distinguish what is good and commendable from what is liable to lead others into error.

In *The Little Book of Truth* Suso states several of Eckhart's doctrines and explains them. He does not attack them, he does not even defend them, but by placing beside them passages of unchallengeable orthodoxy, which are also by Eckhart, he constitutes himself his master's advocate in the most discreet manner. He even quotes several of the propositions of Eckhart that were condemned by Pope John XXII as heterodox or dangerous. Suso shows how they had been perverted or misunderstood by those who were incapable of following Eckhart's flights of fancy and bold paradoxes. Suso was not concerned with putting forward a doctrine for its own sake, but rather with giving an alternative version of some of Eckhart's disputed doctrines.

As a general rule Suso is cautious. He knew that dangerous and subversive teachings were being propagated among the Brethren of the Free Spirit and the Beghards, who held antinomian views that opened up alarming perspectives, such as that a spiritual man can do no sin, that he has all true knowledge, that he is literally one with God. Suso knew, further, that some of the adherents of these sects had quoted Eckhart in support of their false doctrines, as does the 'Wild Man' in *The Little*

Book of Truth. He was aware that Eckhart and other friars had been accused of teaching theology without making the necessary distinctions, of treating subtle matters in sermons to ignorant folk, and so forth. But in spite of all this, so profound was Eckhart's influence on Suso that occasionally phrases slipped from his lips that strike us as scarcely compatible with orthodox tenets.¹

Although Suso, the pupil of Eckhart, had been trained in the speculative approach to mysticism, his own trend is towards psychological analysis rather than speculation.² It was his early education at Cologne and the powerful influence of Eckhart rather than his own temperament that led him at one stage toward speculation. For Suso theology was more than a set of dogmas; it was founded on personal experience, on our experience of the Divine within ourselves. Those who fear God as the stern Judge, the avenger of guilt, the punisher of iniquity, cannot know Him truly. Suso speaks as one who has overcome fear by love. He urges his readers to die to themselves, to rid themselves of all the sins that are incompatible with the presence of God, to love him fervently, and serve Him continually. The religious life was for him a thrilling adventure, the quest of the beloved.

The rivalries of the schools, the selfish ambitions of many scholars, their greed for fat benefices, their pride and vanity disgusted Suso so much that he had apparently no desire to attain the coveted distinction of being sent to study at Paris together with the most brilliant young Dominicans of Germany and other countries.³ He no longer sought to acquire wisdom by intellectual means when he wrote the *Horologium*, but by enlightenment from above. Wisdom is clothed in mystery. It is not to be seized by force. It is only by the practice of contemplation that we can see things as they are, and penetrate the mystery of reality.

Suso was a poet and skilful in his art. His powers of construction are noteworthy. In the *Life* he depicts his religious

¹ See below, p. 33.

² See the excellent account in J.-A. Bizet, *op. cit.*, p. 176.

³ See *Horologium*, ed. Strange, pp. 327-8, 335-6.

development in its successive phases, from his conversion at the age of eighteen, his first ecstasy, through the period of severe mortification and monastic seclusion to his itinerant ministry, in which temptations, illness and persecution followed each other: tribulations from within, and from without. Thus seen, his life has a certain regular rhythm. It is a work of art. But whether fact is not transformed and transfigured by the artist's hand is difficult to decide.

Again, the evolution of his conception of Eternal Wisdom is sketched in the *Horologium*. Wisdom first appears as Suso's spouse; here he was inspired by the Wisdom books of the Old Testament. His point of view is that of youth: it is not entirely abstract; there is something physical about his ideal, though it is pure and free from sensuality. His love was, he tells us, neither entirely human nor entirely divine. As a result of reading the Epistles of Saint Paul, especially First Corinthians and Colossians, Suso learnt to see Christ as the Wisdom of God. This is a much clearer and more powerful concept. But who can say whether this literary description corresponds to Suso's evolution, or is merely suggested by it? There is doubtless both *Dichtung* and *Wahrheit*, fact and fiction, in the final result. There is a deliberate ordering or arranging of the events of Suso's inner and outer life. In the Middle Ages this was regarded as perfectly legitimate. Suso was writing a devotional work, not autobiography as we understand it.

It is characteristic that when Suso wishes to expound theological truth he does not write a compendium but a dialogue. He does not even make it a self-contained work, but writes two unconnected passages in different books. The last four chapters of the *Life* and *The Little Book of Truth* include practically all the mystical doctrine that Suso had to impart. These two portions are so similar in style and subject matter that Laurentius Surius, who translated Suso into Latin,¹ printed them together as one work, adding the end of the *Life* to *The Little Book of Truth*. There is not sufficient justification for this, and it gives us a false impression of Suso. We must take him as he was, and not try to make him more systematic than he was by nature.

¹ Cologne, 1555.

It might not be out of place to give at this point a brief survey of Suso's doctrines, placing them in their proper context. In the fiftieth chapter of the *Life* Suso begins with the fundamental question: What is God? He then proceeds to answer it on strict Thomist lines.¹ He admits that it is a difficult question. All the masters who have ever lived have not been able to settle it. It transcends all reason. Yet by diligent search a studious man can form some idea of God, however remote it is from the full truth. Even this limited knowledge is the highest blessedness.

'Some virtuous pagan masters once searched for Him in this manner, and above all, the wise Aristotle. He investigated the course of nature to find its Lord, searched eagerly and found Him. He proved from the well-ordered course of nature that there must of necessity be one single ruler and lord of all creatures, whom we call God. We have enough knowledge to be aware that this God and Lord is a substantial Being and is eternal. He had no "before" or "after".'

'He is simple,² unchanging, an incorporeal spirit. His essence (or 'essential nature') is His life and activity. His essential intelligence knows all things in Himself and by Himself. His essence is infinite pleasure and joy in Himself. He is, to Himself, and to all those who are to enjoy Him in contemplation, supernatural, ineffable, joy-bringing blessedness.'³

In reply to Elsbeth Stagel's request for further information on this point, Suso continues that this Divine Being is 'an intellectual substance'⁴ of such a nature that mortal eye cannot behold Him in Himself; but we see Him in His works, just as we find the traces of a good craftsman in his works. For, as Saint Paul says, 'the creatures are as a mirror in which God is reflected'.⁵ To speculate is to look in a mirror. To look at the universe is to speculate on the nature of God, to see the Creator

¹ This lesson in theology is written in the form of a dialogue between Suso and Elsbeth Stagel.

² I.e. completely undivided, unlike man, who is compounded of body and soul.

³ Bihlmeyer, *op. cit.*, p. 171.

⁴ In scholastic philosophy 'substance' is that which has a separate existence of its own.

⁵ Romans i, 20.

in His works. Suso paints in glowing colours the beauty of the heavens, with the starry host, the glory of the summer, the grass and foliage and flowers, the song of the birds, and so forth. If God is so lovable in His creatures, how much more lovable must He be in Himself.

Besides this indirect knowledge, we can have direct knowledge of God. Suso tells us of a friar (meaning himself) who in his youth had an ecstasy twice a day for ten years, morning and evening, sinking into the Deity so deeply that he could not speak of it, being united with God in ineffable love and joy. After a passage of great poetic beauty, in which he speaks of the love of God that he experienced in the mystic union, he goes on to say that such experiences as these are not the highest goal of the spiritual life. There are even greater heights to be scaled. This is but the prelude of 'essential union' or 'absorption'.

Replying to a question by Elsbeth, Suso explains what he means by 'essential': 'I call that man essential, who, by dint of constant practice, has conquered the virtues to such a point that they dwell in him to his permanent joy, in the highest and noblest sense, just as the sunlight dwells in the sun. I call "non-essential" one in whom the light of virtue shines in a borrowed manner, inconstantly, imperfectly, like the light of the moon.'

The next question is: Where is God?¹ Suso appeals to the theologians, and asserts on their authority that He is not in one place, but is entire in all things. Logicians tell us that we can sometimes arrive at the meaning of a thing by its name. Being is the first name of God.² Suso next translates a passage from Saint Bonaventura.³ The German version is scarcely intelligible without the Latin original. The substance of it is as follows: in order to understand God, who is pure Being, we must turn our eyes away from the creatures, who have participated being.⁴ They derive their existence from God; they depend on Him

¹ Bihlmeyer, op. cit., pp. 176-8.

² Exodus iii, 14.

³ *Itinerarium Mentis ad Deum*, i, 15.

⁴ They have their being from God. Existence given by the Creator is called 'participated'. It is dependent on God, and is neither self-originating, nor self-sufficient.

for their existence, but He depends on no one. He is self-sufficing, not dependent on anything. He is pure Being, Being in itself, not mixed with non-being, that is to say, free from any deficiency of being. Creatures have participated being; this is not pure; it is mixed with otherness.

Human nature is blind: it cannot penetrate Him, without whom it can neither understand nor see. The eye, if it is paying attention to colours, cannot see the light by which it is enabled to distinguish the colours. Similarly, when our mind's eye is contemplating this or that being, it does not attend to the Being who is everywhere a simple Being, by whose strength it receives the others into itself; it does not perceive Him. Hence a wise master¹ said that the eye of our knowledge, as a result of its infirmity, behaves towards the Being who is Himself the most intelligible of all like the eyes of a bat towards the bright sunlight. For the participated beings scatter and blind the mind, so that it cannot see the Divine darkness, which is in itself the brightest clarity.

After praising the perfection of the Divine nature, Suso proceeds: "This simple, pure Being is the first and highest cause of all created things; and by virtue of His omnipresence He includes all that comes into being in time, as the beginning and end of all things. He is at the same time in all things and outside all things. Hence a master says: "God is a round ring of which the centre is everywhere and the circumference nowhere." "²

He next expounds the dogma of the Trinity.³ 'Every being, the simpler it is in itself, the more manifold is its productive power. What has nothing can give nothing. What has much can give much.' God is an inflowing and overflowing Good, 'whose unfathomable, supernatural Goodness moves Him, not to possess Goodness in Himself alone, but to share it freely in Himself,⁴ and outside Himself. Now the highest Good must necessarily have the highest and richest outpouring in itself,

Aristotle.

² This famous saying originated with the Greeks, and was transmitted through Alanus Insulanus, St. Thomas and others. Suso seems to be quoting it from St. Bonaventura.

³ Bihlmeyer, *op. cit.*, pp. 178-83.

⁴ With the other Persons of the Trinity.

and this outpouring cannot be other than actual, inner, substantial, personal, natural, unconstrainedly necessary, limitless and perfect.'

Here we are moving away from the austere intellectual argument of Saint Thomas¹ and entering the more lyrical sphere of Saint Bonaventura.² Suso continues, using both theologians in turn. 'In the outpouring of the creatures from their first origin there is a circular return from the end back to the beginning; for, as the procession of the Persons in God is the formal image of the origin of the creatures, similarly it is the exemplar of the reflux of the creature to God.'

Suso then makes a distinction between the procession of the Divine Persons and the proceeding forth of the creatures. 'As the creature is a participated being, its giving and its outpouring are likewise partial and measured. A human father gives to his son at birth part of his being, but not all that he is, for he is himself a participated being. . . . If thou canst now, with a pure eye, contemplate the most pure goodness of the supreme Good, who is by His essence a present and operative beginning, loving Himself by His nature and His will, then shalt thou see the transcendental and supernatural outpouring of the Word proceeding from the Father, by which begetting and speaking³ all things are spoken and given.

'In the Supreme Being and in this highest outpouring, the Holy Trinity springs forth: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And if the highest outpouring comes forth from the highest essential Goodness, there must needs be in the outpoured Trinity the highest and most similar consubstantiality, the highest similarity and identity of the essence, which the Persons possess in the joyful outpouring of the undivided substance of the undivided omnipotence of the Three Persons of the Deity.'

The Trinity is a mystery. No one can explain how the Three Persons can exist in the unity of the essence, but after quoting Augustine and Pseudo-Dionysius on the relationship between the Three Persons of the Trinity, Suso asserts that 'the clear

¹ *In Sententias*, I, Dist. 14.

² *Itinerarium Mentis ad Deum*, vi, 2.

³ The Divine conceiving of the Word, in which sense God 'speaks' the Word.

light, the dear Saint Thomas, the Doctor' explains these 'hidden thoughts and proves them'.¹

At this point Elsbeth Stagel raises an objection: 'There are some critical persons who dispute all that is said of God, and think that, for those who wish to attain the highest, God is a harmful obstacle. Man must be rid of God, he must get rid of spirit, repelling all visions and turning solely towards the illuminating truth, namely himself.'²

Suso replies that this is false, by common assent. He admits, however, that in one sense man can indeed get rid of God, that is, in the sense of a God to be feared by the sinner, for the spiritual man overcomes this stage and finds another God, who is to be loved, not feared. Again, in a certain sense, man can get rid of his spirit. A saint who has made the flesh obedient to the spirit sees his own powerlessness and turns away from his own self. He begins to die to himself, to yield wholly to the eternal power of God. He is absorbed or rapt away into a forgetting and losing of his own self, as Saint Paul says: 'I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.'³

Paraphrasing Saint Thomas,⁴ Suso states that the Word is Divine by essence, because otherwise He would be a creature. The Father and the Son are distinct as Persons, though identical in nature. But Saint Thomas's words sound strangely different in Suso's version: 'In the outpouring of the Word from the heart and intelligence of the Father, it must needs be that God contemplates Himself, reflecting on His Divine essence, for if, in the Father's intelligence the object (of His thinking) was not the Divine Being, the begotten Word could not be God, but would be a creature, which would be false. . . . But the contemplation of the Divine essence in the Father's intelligence must take place in such a way that a natural likeness is formed, otherwise the Word would not be the Son. Here we have unity of the essence with distinction of the Persons.'

Finally, Suso deals with the Third Person of the Trinity. He

¹ Bihlmeyer, op. cit., p. 180.

² This is, of course, the doctrine of the Beghards.

³ Galatians ii, 20.

⁴ *Contra Gentiles* iv, 11.

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quotes that truly magnificent passage in which Saint Thomas treats this profound subject. 'As to the procession of the Holy Spirit, we must know that the substance of the Divine intelligence is knowledge, and it must also have an inclination towards its object, in the form in which it was received in the intelligence. This inclination is the will, the desire of which is to seek joy in the highest degree. Note also that the beloved object in the lover is not identical with the similitude of its natural form, as the object of reason is in the light of knowledge. Since the Word proceeds from the Father's contemplation, according to the form of His nature as a distinct Person, His outpouring is called a begetting. But the outpouring of will and that of love are of a different nature, hence the Third Person, who proceeds by the outflow of love, both from the Father and from the express image of His innermost abyss, cannot be called Son or begotten. And since love is in the will in an intelligible or spiritual manner, as an inclination or bond of love immanent in the lover, it follows that the procession of the Third Person which takes place by means of love and will, is fittingly called spirit.' It will be noticed that Suso omits Saint Thomas's explanation¹ of the use of the word 'spirit' or 'breath'. His abridgment of the original rather tends to obscure Saint Thomas's meaning.

Suso distinguished, as did Eckhart, between the Godhead and God. They both followed the Scholastics in making this distinction. The Godhead is the Divine Being undifferentiated into Persons. All the Three Persons of the Deity have the same substance, and from the point of view of the substance all Three Persons are One. Whether the Godhead, as opposed to the Persons, has a real existence, or is only a mental concept, was a point much discussed by the Scholastics. Suso's view, which is strictly orthodox, is that the distinction is not in God Himself, but in our mode of thinking.

There is not much to be said on the subject of the Incarnation. Suso is familiar with the traditional doctrine and he expresses it in Scholastic terms², but in *The Little Book of Eternal*

¹ *Contra Gentiles*, iv, 19.

² See below, 182.

Wisdom he is concerned with Christ's humanity rather than with His divinity.

Although Suso can give us the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity as expounded by Saint Thomas, he interpolates in his discourse, as we have seen,¹ two quotations from other writers. First comes a passage from Saint Augustine: 'The Father is the origin of all the divinity of the Son and the Holy Spirit, both as regards the Person and the essence.'² Next comes a quotation loosely paraphrased from Pseudo-Dionysius: 'In the Father there is an emanation or source of the Deity.'³

These two passages, taken together with that from Saint Thomas, show the dual origin of Suso's theology. Besides the Aristotelian-Thomist stream of thought, which he had made his own, as far as it was known, taught and understood in his own day, there ran the Neo-Platonic current, springing from Plotinus and Pseudo-Dionysius and transmitted by Saint Augustine and Scotus Eriugena. The researches of Gilson⁴ and others have abundantly indicated the co-existence of these two methods of approach to philosophical questions. Suso, the poet, found the Neo-Platonic tendency congenial, as did Eckhart, but, unlike Eckhart, Suso the theologian realized to some extent at least the dangers inherent in its attractive phraseology. It crops up from time to time in Suso's works, nowhere so prominently as in *The Little Book of Truth* and in the concluding chapters of the *Life*, which contains no autobiographical matter, but only doctrinal exposition.

When Suso refers to God as 'the Nothing', or as 'the deep abyss of the Divinity', or when he says that 'God acts and begets, but the Godhead does not act or beget', we catch the unmistakable accent of Eckhart's teaching or that of Pseudo-Dionysius. Not that we can blame Suso for making such observations. He believed, as did Eckhart, that Pseudo-Dionysius

¹ See above, p. 26.

² *De Trinitate*, iv, c. 20, n. 29. Augustine's word *principium* means both 'beginning' and 'principle'. Suso takes it in the first sense.

³ *De Divinis Nominibus*, ii, 7.

⁴ *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen âge*, i, pp. 5-127, Paris, 1926; see also the excellent summary in *St. Thomas Aquinas* (Proceedings of the Royal Academy, xxi), London, 1935.

was a disciple of Saint Paul himself, a Father of the Church, inspired by the Holy Spirit. Had not Saint Thomas himself written a commentary on the works of Dionysius the Areopagite, to whose name in those days no prefix was attached?

When Suso, in common with other mystics, uses the Word 'Nothing' to apply to God, he employs it in an orthodox sense. It does not, of course, imply that God does not exist. On the contrary, it means that He exists in a sense in which no creature can be said to exist, since He has a fuller existence. No name we can think of is adequate to describe Him, and it would be better not to name Him at all, than to reduce Him to our mortal stature. 'Nothing' suggests the infinite, the incomprehensible, since any 'thing' is limited and intelligible. God is not incomprehensible in the sense that He cannot be understood. We cannot understand Him fully because of the limitations of our intelligence.

When Suso uses the word 'Nothing' he is fully aware of all this, as is testified by various passages in his works, particularly in *The Little Book of Truth*.¹ He knows that the Godhead is best explained by negatives, by saying what It is not, rather than attempting to define what It is, whereas God may be regarded in a more positive and less negative way where the Three Persons are concerned. If we say that God is a 'Nothing', we see, as it were, one aspect of the Deity. If we say that the Godhead or 'Nothing' is undifferentiated, we penetrate farther in our understanding of him, and if we say that there are Three Divine Persons, we make a further step in understanding Him, or as Suso would put it, we penetrate deeper into 'the ground of God'.² The phrase 'the ground of God' might easily be misunderstood. We are not to take it as meaning that there are, so to speak, divisions in the Divine substance or being. To 'penetrate into the ground' means to have a fuller understanding of the nature of God.

Among other difficult phrases that Suso inherited from Eckhart is 'the fathomless abyss', which expresses the same kind of idea as 'the Nothing'. The figure of the abyss denotes the in-

¹ See below, p. 176.

² See below, pp. 191-2.

comprehensibility of God, the inexhaustible riches of His wisdom. Again, Suso speaks of 'the abandonment of the self in the Nothing'. This does not imply that the worshipper is totally merged in God in the mystic union, which would be the pantheistic explanation, but rather that the human will is merged in the Divine will. It is a union of wills, not of essences.

The Eckhartian expression 'the naked Godhead' is used several times by Suso, in the sense of 'the pure Godhead'. God is thought of as pure Being, simple Being, unmixed with non-being. Eckhart's tendency was always to stress the majesty of God and this led him to minimize the importance of the creatures. He was accused at his trial of denying the real existence of things.¹ Suso also uses such phrases as 'the nothingness of things', but what he certainly intended to convey was that in comparison with God created things were so insignificant as to be a mere nothing.

It is characteristic that we find in Suso's writings no comprehensive account of the theological doctrine of the Divine ideas. There are two relevant passages in *The Little Book of Truth* that refer to this doctrine.² Neither is complete in itself, nor do they form a complete whole taken together. They are only comprehensible to those who have already studied the subject. But from these and other references,³ we can reconstruct Suso's doctrine. We find that he follows Saint Thomas faithfully. The line of argument is as follows: God knows all things, and hence He knows all creatures, that is, all created things. The Divine plan of creation was in the mind of God, and therefore man existed in His mind as an 'idea' or 'prototype', just as, to use a homely and not entirely accurate analogy, the plan of a building may be said to exist in the mind of the architect before the builders begin their work.

Saint Thomas taught that the 'ideas' were in God, although not separate from His essence, since He is a simple, not a composite being. It is therefore legitimate for Suso to speak of the

¹ The 26th condemned proposition was: 'Omnes creaturae sunt unum purum nihil.' H. Denziger, *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, p. 216, 14th ed. Freiburg, i. B, 1922.

² See below, pp. 180-1.

³ E.g. Bihlmeyer, *op. cit.*, pp. 157, 186.

external pre-existence of man, not in the sense that men existed before birth as separate human personalities, but in the sense that they exist eternally in the mind of God. Biblical support for this doctrine was found in the famous passage in Saint John's Gospel,¹ which, as interpreted by Saint Augustine and many other Fathers of the Church, ran 'Everything that was made had life in Him'. The creatures exist in God, but 'without any distinction of form', that is, not as real and separate individuals.

The reader who comes from the study of the Spanish mystics to their German counterparts, and in particular to Suso, cannot fail to notice one essential difference. He made no attempt to classify religious experiences, as did, for instance, Saint Teresa, with her states of prayer and spiritual 'Mansions'. Suso has no technique of mysticism. At the very beginning of his religious life he had an ecstasy that culminated in the mystic union. According to Saint Teresa's views, this would normally have come later, after prolonged efforts and many preliminary trials. But in spite of the differences in approach and terminology, there are some parallels between the two mystics.

Suso distinguishes between a state of intermittent union with God and one in which the sense of oneness is permanent. Saint Teresa speaks of the sixth and seventh 'Mansions' of the mystic way. She does not go quite as far as Suso: in her seventh 'Mansion', or 'Union of the Marriage', the sense of oneness is almost continuous, but there may be interruptions.² Although Suso uses no labels and makes no elaborate distinctions, he describes the same kind of experiences as Saint Teresa. He tells us of visions and ecstasies, of trials and difficulties, but does not define them with precision. Most of the mystical passages in his works are to be found in the *Life* and *The Little Book of Truth*: the former gives us the practical and the latter the theoretic aspect of things. There are only sporadic and incidental references in his other works.³

¹ Chapter i, 3-4.

² See E. Allison Peers, *Studies of the Spanish Mystics*, i, 190, London, 1927.

³ For a good example in *The Little Book of Wisdom*, see below, p. 92.

In the *Life*¹ he gives us the famous description of his first ecstasy on Saint Agnes's Day.¹ In a later passage, in the fiftieth chapter, he relates that there was a friar (Suso) 'who at his beginning (in religion) for some years was granted by God such grace, usually twice a day, in the morning and the evening, and it lasted about as long as two vigils. He sank during this time so completely into God, the Eternal Wisdom, that he could not speak of it. At times he had a loving converse with God, then a lamentable sighing, at times silent laughter. He often felt as if he were hovering in the air, floating between time and eternity, on the deep waves of God's unfathomable wonders. His heart was so full of it that at times he laid his hand on his heart and said: "Alas, my heart, how will it be with thee to-day?"' ²

In *The Little Book of Truth* Suso discusses the nature of the mystic union. Like all other mystics, he is conscious of the total inadequacy of words to express the ineffable. It is, he says, as if one were to say 'chopping-block' instead of 'fine pearl'.³ He tells us that it is a union of wills,⁴ in which the soul loses all consciousness of time and even of its own separate identity. When the ecstasy is over, the soul remembers that it is an individual. Suso's theological training reminds him that the sense of oneness, far stronger than any ordinary human experience, does not really imply that the soul is one with God, in the pantheistic sense. But on occasion, when he forgets his theology, Suso lets phrases escape him that might have been written by Eckhart. Thus, he puts into the mouth of God the words: 'I will kiss them (the suffering saints) so affectionately and embrace them so lovingly that I shall be they and they shall be I, and we two shall be united in one for ever.'⁵ Again, in *The Little Book of Truth*, he says: 'The essence of the soul is united with the essence of the Nothing, and the powers of the soul with the activity of the Nothing. The Nothing has the works in itself.'⁶ This sounds like quietism or pure pantheism, and is difficult to

¹ Pp. 19-20. Bihlmeyer, op. cit., pp. 10-11.

² Bihlmeyer, p. 173.

³ See below, p. 192.

⁴ See below, p. 198.

⁵ *Life*, p. 93. Bihlmeyer, op. cit., p. 93.

⁶ See below, p. 196.

reconcile with Suso's known convictions. We are compelled to assume that Suso here inadvertently exceeds the limits of sound doctrine.

At the same time it is only fair to add that Suso scrupulously avoids some of Eckhart's boldest and most criticized phrases. He never speaks of the 'begetting of the Word in the soul'. The only birth in the soul that he mentions is the regeneration of the individual. In all his works Suso only once¹ uses the term 'spark of the soul', in a passage that echoes Eckhart: 'But a wise man, owing to the bright spark of the soul, returns to that which is eternal, from which he emanated.' The phrase 'spark of the soul' (*scintilla animae*) was perfectly harmless as used by the Scholastics. Saint Thomas himself gave it the sanction of his authority, but it had doubtless become suspect as a result of Eckhart's trial. It had acquired pantheistic associations, since Eckhart was charged with asserting that the spark of the soul was uncreated.² Unlike his contemporary Tauler, Suso rarely speaks of the 'ground of the soul'.

Although Suso did not attempt to systematize the religious life, he took over the traditional division into three stages, known as the threefold way.³ His authorities were Saint Augustine and Saint Thomas. The latter, quoting Saint Augustine, speaks of the 'degrees of supernatural charity', which he calls 'the beginning, progression and perfection'.⁴ Suso often uses the terms 'beginners, progressors, perfect' to denote those who are at each particular stage. The final stage, perfection, is in Thomist teaching the beatific vision, which is only attained in Heaven. Suso, however, identifies it with the mystic union, which is experienced here on earth.

He reconciles this view with the traditional doctrine by saying that what is experienced here is only a foretaste of the beatific vision of God in Paradise. This is Suso's solution of a dilemma that confronts mystics generally. They feel that the mystic union so far transcends everything that they can imagine

¹ Bihlmeyer, op. cit., p. 192, line 10.

² Among the condemned propositions was 'Aliquid est in anima, quod est increatum et increabile.' H. Denziger, op. cit., p. 216.

³ See below, p. 98.

⁴ *Summa Theologica*, IIa IIae, q. 24, a. 9.

to be possible that they cannot conceive of any higher goal, here or elsewhere. In his description of his first ecstasy on Saint Agnes's Day,¹ Suso wrote: 'If this be not Heaven, I do not know what Heaven is.' But his theological training had taught him that there must be something higher.

There is also a second classification that is much more explicit. Saint Thomas and Saint Augustine merely indicate a beginning, a middle and an end, without indicating their precise nature. This other 'threefold way' includes the stages of purgation, illumination and perfection. It is best explained in one of Suso's *Letters*.² In this passage he quotes Pseudo-Dionysius,³ but, whereas the Neo-Platonist describes the three stages as simultaneous, Suso makes them consecutive. In Pseudo-Dionysius the higher choirs of angels are engaged in purifying and illuminating the lower choirs, thus leading them on to perfection. Suso may not have been the first writer to introduce this innovation, but he certainly did much to popularize it.

There are two other interesting references. In the *Life*⁴ there is a description of the bodily austerities that Suso inflicted upon himself. At the end of this period he entered the school of perfect abandonment,⁵ or self-surrender, which corresponds to the perfective stage of the threefold way. Here there is no further need for the mortification of the flesh. But there is no separate stage of purgation, so that we must assume that it proceeded simultaneously with the first or the last phase.

The other reference is in the *Horologium*.⁶ Suso asserts that perfect praise of God is not possible until the human soul is purified of its earthly vices, cleansed of all the pollution of the passions, and, as far as is granted to frail humanity, raised to immovable serenity and perfect purity. Here we have the first and the final stages again, with no mention of the intermediate one. This is quite characteristic of the mystics. They are so eager to press on to the final stage, that they are apt to hurry over, or

¹ *Life*, p. 19. Bihlmeyer, op. cit., p. 10.

² *Grosses Briefbuch*, No. xxii. Bihlmeyer, op. cit., pp. 471-2.

³ *De Coelesti Hierarchia*, viii, 1.

⁴ Pp. 46-55. Bihlmeyer, pp. 39-53.

⁵ *Life*, pp. 55-7. Bihlmeyer, pp. 53-4.

⁶ Ed. Strange, 204-5.

omit entirely, the middle phase. Suso pays considerable attention to the difficulties of beginners. This was natural, since he took his pastoral work so seriously. *The Little Book of Eternal Wisdom* was written especially for beginners. It is Suso's constant care, in his letters, sermons, and devotional works, to help and encourage his penitents in their early struggles. He compares the first stage with the Exodus of the Jews from Egypt; the second with the journey through the Desert, the third with the Promised Land. These similes are common enough in medieval literature.

Suso's treatment of conversion is not exhaustive, nor is it particularly philosophical, but it reveals profound insight into human character and considerable literary skill.¹ In *The Little Book of Wisdom* he shows how some men are drawn to God without their knowing it. The Servant (Suso) felt from his childhood an unknown power that guided him, first without his knowledge. It made those things attractive that were good and made everything evil repellent. He asked: 'What is this power?' and received the answer 'The Wisdom of God'. There arose in him a deep sense of his religious vocation, a steadfast trust in God.

The Servant knew from his own experiences, and later from hearing confessions, all the temptations that confront a young religious at this early stage. There is the danger of laxity, of avoiding excessive austerity as 'unsocial'. On the other hand, there is the peril of rigorism, of fanaticism. There is the third pitfall of quietism, of a trust in Divine Providence that leads to inaction. The worshipper, having reached a certain stage of perfection, leaves everything to God, becoming, as it were, an entirely passive instrument. This may happen before the mystic union, but it is much more dangerous after it. Quietism may reach the point at which the mystic considers himself incapable of sin, an aberration that Suso strongly condemned.²

There was, moreover, the temptation of inordinate depression, the fear of sinfulness, the fear that one has committed an unforgivable sin, the lack of trust in God's mercy, the fear of

See the excellent account in J.-A. Bizet, *op. cit.*, pp. 97-112.

² Bihlmeyer *op. cit.*, p. 157.

His stern justice. This was conquered in Suso's case by the realization that God is love and that 'perfect love casteth out fear'.¹ The Servant learnt to rest in the Divine will, without quietism on one hand, or morbid apprehension on the other.

In the *Life*² he speaks of his conversion in his eighteenth year as a sudden turning away from the things of this world to God, which none of his companions could understand, and about which he could confide in no one. He had been, he tells us, lukewarm before this change; but his self-depreciation need not be taken too literally.

For Suso was a born writer, and the style was the man. His skill in narrative is seen in the delightful episodes of the *Life*, his exuberant imagination in all his works. His imagery is rich and varied. He often expresses in concrete terms what a more philosophical mind would describe in the abstract. Thus, he speaks of the wounds of Christ, of His blood, His Cross, rather than of His atonement.³ His work is charged with emotional power. To say this is merely to say that he was a poet, given to personifying thoughts or ideas, identifying himself with what he describes. He has a rare gift of expression; he is a master of prose, fluent in the use of two languages, German and Latin.

Although he had at his disposal all the resources of prose and verse of his native tongue, he finds himself quite at a loss when he sets out to tread the uncharted paths of his own mystical experience. What he has seen and heard cannot be told in words. Like other mystics he has to use the language of allegory. Here his mastery of words, his feeling for their sound and associations and for verbal music, stand him in good stead.

There are some traits in Suso's style that may be termed specifically German. There is, for instance, his tendency to hyperbole. One of the best examples is the famous anecdote or *exemplum* of the bird pecking at a rock as an image of eternity. Here at least the treatment is adequate to the theme. He loves

¹ St. John iv, 8.

² P. 16. Bihlmeyer, p. 8.

³ Dr. R. H. Thouless traces the same tendency in an English mystic: *The Lady Julian: A Psychological Study*, p. 58, London (S.P.C.K.), 1924.

to pile up epithets and phrases to obtain a strong cumulative effect. Another German trait is his sentiment, which often becomes sentimentality. In the *Life* this trend is accentuated by the contribution of Elsbeth Stigel, but it is prominent enough in the other works. Much of the charm of his style is due to his absolute honesty and sincerity, the complete absence of pose or self-assertion.

The German of Suso is not that of Goethe, but a medieval dialect. To translate him is a formidable task. A thorough knowledge of the modern language is not enough; it is essential to know at least three Middle High German dialects. This is the rock on which most former translators of the German mystics have foundered. Suso uses some words that are not to be found in any dictionary, and he also employs familiar words in new meanings.

There is also the question of style. If we translate the original into literary English with an archaic, scriptural flavour, we run the risk of falsifying the spirit of the original. Suso's native Swabian was on one hand a homely peasant *patois*, full of proverbial saws and popular lore, practical, vivid, and like the Spanish of Saint Teresa, unfettered by grammatical or logical convention. It is at times quite prosaic and matter-of-fact. On the other hand, as the heir of the *Minnesinger*, Suso uses rhythmical sentences, interspersed occasionally with rhyme. He is fond of alliteration, parallelism and other rhetorical devices.

To translate literally would mean to be sometimes obscure, or unintelligible, at other times ludicrous. One has to make an attempt to depict this mixed style, artless and even uncouth at one moment, highly imaginative at another. Suso is particularly careless about the agreement of subject and predicate, or the logical construction of his sentences. His pronouns are often ambiguous. One cannot follow him too closely in these vagaries, but one has to suggest the looseness of his constructions by giving occasional specimens, to which attention can be drawn in footnotes.

The Swabian dialect was poor in abstract terms. Latin was the language of scholarship and was well fitted for use in theological or philosophical discussions. The German mystics

INTRODUCTION

coined new words and adapted old ones for their purpose, thus gradually building up a tradition, but their terminology remained vague and ambiguous. One word had to do duty for half a dozen meanings. The mystics spoke in German and thought in Latin. When a theologian trained in the Thomist school expounded dogma to nuns and pious layfolk, the impression left on their minds was quite different from the original intention. The well-defined Latin term was replaced by a German word with quite different associations and a new emotional content. The language of symbol and allegory conjured up all kinds of misunderstandings. Suso was aware of these difficulties and he avoided abstract discussions more and more in the course of his evolution as a writer.

Suso often quotes the Bible from memory or at second hand. In such passages I have followed his version. In the footnotes the references are to the Vulgate. Where the Authorized Version deviates from the Vulgate I have added chapter and verse in brackets, as in the case of the Psalms.

The text used for this translation is that of Bihlmeyer, whose critical edition superseded all previous versions. My thanks are due to the firm of Kohlhammer of Leipzig for their kind permission to use this text. I should like to express my indebtedness to Professor E. Allison Peers, the General Editor of the series, who read through the whole of my typescript and made many valuable suggestions on points of detail. Mr. J. G. Dawson, Lecturer in Medieval Philosophy in Glasgow University, has been untiring in his efforts to assist, and this book owes much to his advice and criticism.

JAMES M. CLARK

Little Book of Eternal Wisdom

Prologue

Once a Preacher¹ stood after Matins in front of a crucifix, and complained feelingly to God that he could not meditate on His Passion and His sufferings, and that this was a source of grief to him, for hitherto he had had very great difficulty in so doing. And, as he was thus lamenting, he fell into an ecstasy, and a voice spoke swiftly and clearly within him thus: 'Thou shouldst make one hundred *venias*, and each *venia*² should be accompanied by a special meditation of My sufferings, and each meditation should go with a request, and each suffering should be spiritually impressed upon thee in such a way that thou wilt suffer it again for My sake, as far as is possible for thee.' And as he stood there in the light,³ and attempted to count them, he could only think of ninety.

So he asked God: 'Beloved Lord, Thou didst speak of a hundred but I cannot find more than ninety.' Then ten more were revealed to him, which he had previously received in the chapter-house, before walking, as was his custom, in imitation of Christ's sorrowful path to death, and coming to the crucifix.⁴ And then he found that the hundred meditations included His bitter death from beginning to end, very precisely. And when he began to practise them as they had been revealed to him, his grief was transformed into lovely sweetness.

Now he desired, if perchance anyone else had the same difficulty, feeling, as he did, pain and bitterness while meditating on the lovable sufferings on which all salvation rests, that such

¹ A Dominican friar, i.e. Suso.

² A complete prostration on the right side, as practised by the Dominicans.

³ Of the Deity.

⁴ See Suso's *Life*, Chapters xiii, xvi.

a person might be helped, and that he might practise it, and not desist until he also was healed. And therefore he wrote down the meditations and he did so in German, since they were revealed to him by God in that language.

Afterwards he had many a bright inpouring of Divine truth, of which they¹ were the cause, and a conversation with Eternal Wisdom began within him. But it was not carried on by means of physical speech or with imaginary answers. It was only carried on by means of meditation in the light of the Holy Scriptures, the answers of which cannot deceive. Thus, the words are taken either from the mouth of Eternal Wisdom, who spoke them Himself in the Gospels, or from the most learned teachers, and they contain either the same words, or the same sense or the self-same truth, which is expressed in the sense of the Holy Scriptures, through which Eternal Wisdom spoke. Nor did the visions that are here described take place in physical form; they are only a parable.² The words of *Our Lady's Lament*³ he took from the tenor of the words of Saint Bernard.

And he presents the doctrine in dialogue form, so that it may be more attractive; not that he is the one to whom it refers, or who himself spoke the words. He only intends to give therein some simple teaching, so that both he and all other men might find something in it, each according to his needs.

As teachers should, he plays the part of all kinds of persons. At one time he speaks in the role of a sinner, then in that of a perfect man, sometimes in the image of the living soul, then, according to the matter, in the semblance of a servant who speaks to Eternal Wisdom.

Nearly everything is expounded in a figurative manner. Much is in the form of instruction, which a diligent man can choose for himself for devotional prayers. The ideas here expressed are simple, and the words are even simpler, for they proceed from a simple soul, and are meant for simple persons who still have failings to overcome.

¹ The Hundred Meditations.

² They are not to be taken in the literal sense, but figuratively.

³ See below, Chapters xvij, xix and xx.

When this friar had begun to write on the three subjects: the sufferings,¹ the imitation, and all the rest that is in the book, and had come to the passage about contrition: 'Come, my soul, etc.',² it chanced that he found it difficult to proceed in his work. Now, once at noon he had sat down on his chair, and in a trance he seemed to see very clearly two guilty men in conventual garb sitting before him; and he scolded them very severely because they were sitting idle and were not doing anything. Then it was given to him to understand that he was to thread them a needle that was put into his hand. Now the thread was threefold,³ and two parts were short, but the third was a little longer. And as he tried to twist the three strands together, he could not succeed in doing it. Then he saw on his right hand beside him, Our dear Lord standing, as He was when He was taken away from the pillar,⁴ standing in front of him as kindly and paternally as if He were his father. Then he noticed that His tender body had a natural colour. It was not exactly white; it was corn-coloured that is, white and red⁵ well mixed together, and that is the most natural colour. And he noticed that His whole body was pierced with wounds, and the wounds were fresh and bleeding; and some were round, and some angular; some were very long, where the scourge had torn Him. As He stood there so lovingly before him, and looked at him so kindly, the Preacher raised his hands, and passed them to and fro over His bleeding wounds, and then he took the three strands of thread and quickly joined them together. And then strength was given him, and he understood that he had to complete it,⁶ and that God would clothe in eternal beauty, in a garment wonderfully woven from His wounds, those who spend their life here in so doing.

This should be known: it is one thing to hear for oneself a sweet lute, sweetly played, and quite another thing merely to hear about it. In the same way there is a great difference between hearing words received in pure grace flowing from a

¹ Of Christ.

² See below, p. 59.

³ *The Little Book of Wisdom* consists of three parts.

⁴ After the scourging.

⁵ Cf. Canticles v, 10.

⁶ The unfinished book.

living heart through a living mouth, and reading the same words when they are written on dead parchment, and especially in the German language.¹ For then they wither somehow, and fade like roses that are plucked, for the joyful melody which above all things moves a human heart then dies away, and they are received in the dryness of parched hearts. No string was ever so sweet that it would not become silent if it was strung on a dried-up stick. A loveless heart can understand a loving tongue as little as a German understands an Italian.² And hence a diligent man should hasten to the outflowing source of this sweet doctrine, that he may learn to consider them in their origin, in which they were in their living source, in their wonderful beauty. And that was the inpouring of actual grace, in which they could even have revived dead hearts. And whoever contemplates them in this way can indeed scarcely ever read through this without his heart being deeply moved, either to fervent love, or to new light, or to longing for God and hatred of sin, or to some other spiritual desire, in which the soul is renewed in grace.

Here ends the prologue, that is, the introduction, of this little book.

¹ This preference for Latin was typical of the Middle Ages. Suso was one of the greatest exponents of the vernacular he criticizes.

² Cf. St. Bernard, *Sermo* 79 in *Cantica*, n. 1.

First Part

CHAPTER ONE

How some men are drawn to God, unknown to them

*Hanc amavi et exquisivi a iuventute mea, et quaesivi mihi sponsam assumere.*¹

These words are written in the Book of Wisdom and are spoken by the fair lovely Eternal Wisdom, and the meaning is: 'I have loved her and sought her from my youth, and have chosen her as my bride.'

In his early youth, an impetuous soul strayed into the paths of error. Then, in spiritual imaginings, Eternal Wisdom met him, and led him through rough and smooth ways till she brought him to the right path of Divine truth. And when he recalled the wonderful guidance he had received, he spoke to God thus: 'Beloved, gentle Lord, since the days of my childhood, my heart has sought for something with an ardent thirst. Lord, what that is I cannot yet fully understand. Lord, I have pursued it for many a year eagerly, and I have never yet succeeded, because I do not rightly know what it is, and yet it is something that draws my heart and soul towards itself, and without which I can never find true peace. Lord, in the first days of my youth I tried to find it in the creatures, as I saw others do; but the more I sought, the less I found it, and the nearer I went to it, the further off it was. For of every image that appeared to me, before I had fully tested it, or abandoned myself to peace in it, an inner voice said to me: 'This is not what thou seekest.' And I have always had this revulsion from things. Lord, my heart now yearns for it, for it would gladly possess it, and it² has often experienced what it is not; but what

¹ Wisdom viii, 2.

² His heart.

it is, my heart has not discovered. Alas, beloved Lord of heaven, what is it, or of what nature is it, that it should so mysteriously make itself felt within me?'

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: Dost thou not recognize it? Has she¹ not lovingly embraced thee, and often helped thee on thy way, until she has now won thee for herself?

THE SERVANT: Lord, I have never perceived nor heard of it; I know not what it is.

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: That is not surprising, for thy familiarity with the creatures and her strangeness² have caused that. But now open thy eyes and see who I am. It is I, Eternal Wisdom, who have chosen thee for herself from all eternity with the embrace of My eternal providence. I have supported thee so often on the way; thou wouldst have been separated from Me so many times if I had forsaken thee. Thou foundest always in every creature something that repelled, and that is the truest sign of My elect, that I wish to have them for Myself.

THE SERVANT: Gentle, lovely Eternal Wisdom, and art Thou that which I have for so very long sought after? Art Thou the one for whom my soul ever strove? Alas, my God, why didst Thou not show Thyself to me for this long time? How very long Thou hast postponed it! How many toilsome ways I have struggled through!³

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: Had I done so then, thou wouldst not have recognized my goodness so clearly as thou hast done now.

THE SERVANT: Ah, immeasurable Goodness, how sweetly Thou hast now revealed Thy loving kindness in me! When I did not exist, Thou gavest me my being. When I had departed from Thee, Thou wouldst not leave me. When I wished to escape thee, Thou didst so sweetly hold me captive! Ah, Eternal Wisdom, if now my heart could break into a thousand pieces, and embrace Thee, the joy of my heart, and spend all my days with Thee in steadfast love and perfect praise, that would be

¹ In German, as in Latin, *wisdom* is of the feminine gender.

² She is a stranger to thee.

³ Cf. Wisdom v, 7.

my heart's desire! For truly that man is blessed whose desires Thou dost so affectionately anticipate, by never allowing him true rest until he seeks his rest in Thee alone.¹

Ah, rare, lovely Wisdom, since I now have found in Thee the one whom my soul loves, despise not Thy poor creature. See, how completely my heart is silent towards all this world in joy and sorrow! Lord, must my heart be for ever silent towards Thee? Grant, O grant, beloved Lord, that my wretched soul may speak a word to Thee, for my full heart can bear it no longer alone. In this wide world it has no one in whom it can confide, save Thee, gentle, rare, beloved Lord and Brother! Lord, Thou alone seest and knowest the nature of a loving heart, and knowest that no one can love what he can in no wise understand. Therefore, since I must now love Thee alone, grant that I may know Thee better, that I may then love Thee entirely.

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: According to the natural order, we take the highest emanation of all beings from their first origin through the noblest beings down to the lowest. But the return to the origin takes place through the lowest to the highest. Therefore, if thou wouldst see Me in My uncreated Divinity, thou shouldst learn to know Me in My suffering humanity,² for that is the swiftest way to eternal bliss.

THE SERVANT: Then, Lord, I will remind Thee to-day of the boundless love through which Thou didst descend from Thy high throne, from the royal seat of the Father's heart, down to thirty-three years of exile and contempt, and of the love that Thou hadst for me and for all men, which Thou didst reveal most of all in the most bitter pangs of Thy terrible death. Lord, remember that Thou didst reveal Thyself to my soul in spiritual fashion in the most lovable form to which Thy boundless love has ever brought Thee.

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: The more I am worn out, and the nearer to death from love, the more lovely am I to a properly ordered mind. My boundless love reveals itself in the

¹ St. Augustine, *Confessions*, I, i.

² St. Augustine, *Tractatus* 13 in *Joannem*, n. 4.

whole bitterness of My sufferings, as the sun in its beams, as the fair rose in its fragrance, and as the strong fire in its burning heat. Therefore, hear with devotion how profoundly I suffered for thy sake.

CHAPTER TWO

What happened before the Crucifixion

After the Last Supper, when in the anguish of My gentle heart, and in the pain of My whole body, I resigned myself on the mountain¹ to the pangs of bitter death, finding that it was near at hand, I was covered with bloody sweat. I was captured by My foes, harshly bound, wretchedly led away. In the night I was shamefully ill-treated; I was scourged, was spat upon, and My eyes were blindfolded. Early in the morning I was brought before Caiaphas, accused, found guilty, and delivered to death. Ineffable grief was seen in My pure Mother, from the first glance with which she saw Me in anguish, until I was hanged on the Cross. I was shamefully brought before Pilate, falsely accused, condemned to death. They stood opposite Me, with terrible eyes, like cruel giants, and I stood before them meekly, like a lamb. I, Eternal Wisdom, was mocked as a fool before Pilate in white clothing. My fair body was painfully disfigured and bruised by the cruel lashes of the scourge. My gentle head was pierced, and My loving face was covered with spittle and blood. Thus, after being condemned, I was wretchedly and shamefully led with My Cross to My death. They cried out at Me very fiercely, so that their cries resounded in the air: 'Hang him, hang the criminal!'

THE SERVANT: Ah, Lord, the beginning is so very painful, how can it end? If I saw a wild animal thus ill-treated in my presence, I could scarcely bear it; how then would Thy sufferings pierce my heart and soul, and rightly so!

But, Lord, there is a great wonder in my heart. Beloved Lord, I seek Thy Divinity everywhere, but Thou dost only reveal Thy humanity. I seek Thy sweetness, Thou dost put forward

¹ The Mount of Olives.

thy bitterness. I wished to suck at Thy breast, Thou dost teach me to fight. Ah, Lord, what meanest Thou by this?

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: No one can attain to Divine heights or to unusual sweetness, unless he be first drawn through the example of My human bitterness. The higher one climbs without passing through My humanity, the deeper one falls. My humanity is the way by which one must go, My sufferings are the gate through which one must pass, if one would attain what thou seekest. Therefore, put away the timidity of thy heart, and enter the lists of knightly courage, where I am, for weakness befits not the knight in the place where his lord stands in valiant courage. I will clothe thee with My armour, for all My sufferings must be experienced by thee, according to thy strength.

First make thyself bold, for thy heart must often die within thee, before thou canst overcome thy weakness, and sweat the bloody sweat of many a painful ordeal, in which I will prepare thyself for Me; for I will dung thy garden of spices¹ with red blossom.² Contrary to old custom, thou must be taken prisoner and bound; thou wilt often be slandered secretly by thy enemies, and publicly shamed; many a false judgment of the people will be passed on thee. Thou shalt diligently bear in thy heart My Passion with maternal hearty love.³ Thou shalt have many a harsh judge of thy godly life, and thy godly manner of life will often be scornfully mocked by the human manner. Thy unpractised body will be scourged with a hard severe life. Thou wilt be scornfully crowned with the persecution of thy saintly life. Afterwards thou wilt be led out with Me on the sorrowful way of the Cross when thou dost surrender thine own will and forsake thyself, and be as free with regard to all creatures in those matters that may cause thee to stray from thy eternal salvation, as is a dying man, when he goes hence and has nothing more to do with this world.

THE SERVANT: Alas, Lord, that is a toilsome undertaking for me. My whole nature is afraid at these words; Lord, how could

¹ The soul.

² Of suffering.

³ I.e. With love as tender as that of a mother.

I ever suffer all this? Gentle Lord, I must say one thing: couldst Thou in Thy eternal wisdom find no other way to save me, and to reveal Thy love to me, by which Thou couldst relieve Thyself of Thy great sufferings and me of my bitter compassion? How very strange Thy judgments seem!¹

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: No one should enter the fathomless abyss of My mystery, wherein I ordain all things according to My eternal Providence, for none can understand them. And yet there is therein a power to do this and many other things, which is never exercised.² Yet know that in the order of created things no more pleasing manner could be used. The Lord of nature does not consider what He is able to do in nature; He considers what is most fitting for every creature, and He acts accordingly.³ How could man know better the Divine mystery than in His assumption of humanity? If a man had lost joy from inordinate pleasure, how could he discover true eternal joy? How could the unpractised way of a hard despised life be carried on unless it was led by God Himself? If thou didst lie in the judgment of death, if then someone else received the death-blow instead of thee, how could he show more loyalty and love to thee, or on the other hand, how could he better incite thee to love him? If there be anyone whom My boundless love, My inexpressible mercy, My glorious Divinity, My most gracious humanity, My most comforting friendship, move not to deep love, what then could soften his stony heart? Ask the fair order of all creatures whether there was any more beautiful way of maintaining My justice, demonstrating My boundless mercy, ennobling human nature, pouring forth My goodness, reconciling heaven and earth, than that of My bitter death?

THE SERVANT: Lord, truly, I begin to perceive indeed that it is so, and all those who are not blinded by folly, and all who consider what is just, must agree with Thee, and praise Thy fair, loving action above all others. But to imitate Thee is painful for an indolent body.

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: Be not afraid of imitating My

¹ Romans xi, 33.

² I.e. God could have saved mankind in many other ways, as He had the power.

³ St. Thomas, *Summa Theologica*, I, qu. 3, art. 2.

sufferings. For if God is so fully within a man that suffering becomes easy for him, then he has no cause for complaint. No one enjoys My presence more in unusual sweetness than those who share with Me the hardest bitterness. No one complains more about the bitterness of the husk than he who knows not the sweetness of the kernel. If we have a good comrade half the battle is won.

THE SERVANT: Lord, Thy words of comfort have made me so valiant that methinks I can do and suffer all things in Thee.¹ Therefore, I ask Thee to open up fully the treasure-house of Thy sufferings, and tell me still more of them.

¹ Philippians iv, 13.

CHAPTER THREE

How He felt on the Cross as regards the inner man

ETERNAL WISDOM: When I was suspended on the high branch of the Cross with boundless love, for the sake of thee and of all men, My whole form was most wretchedly disfigured, My clear eyes were dimmed and lost their lustre; My Divine ears were filled with mockery and insult, My noble sense of smell was assailed by an evil stench, My sweet mouth with a bitter draught, My gentle sense of touch with hard blows. Then I could not find a place of rest in the whole world, for My Divine head was bowed down by pain and torment; My joyful throat was rudely bruised; My pure countenance was defiled with spittle; the clear colour of My cheeks turned wan and pallid. Look, My fair form was then disfigured, as though I were a leper, and had never been fair Wisdom.¹

THE SERVANT: O Thou most charming Mirror of all grace, on whom the heavenly spirits feast their eyes, as on the beauty of the spring, would that I might have seen Thy beloved countenance in Thy dying hour, until I had covered it with my heartfelt tears, and gazed my fill on Thy fair eyes and Thy bright cheeks, so that I might relieve my heart's grief with profound lamentation.

Ah, beloved Lord, Thy sufferings affect some persons deeply, they can lament feelingly, and weep for Thee sincerely. Ah, Lord, would that I could lament as the spokesman of all loving hearts, that I could shed the bright tears of all eyes, and utter the lamentations of all tongues: then I would show Thee to-day how deeply the anguish of Thy Passion affects me!

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: None can better show how much My Passion affects them than those who share it with Me

¹ Cf. Isaiah liii, 2, 4.

by the testimony of their works. I would rather have a free heart, untroubled by ephemeral love, which with steadfast diligence follows that which is highest, imitating the example of My life, than that thou shouldst for ever lament for Me, and shed as many tears weeping over My martyrdom as ever drops of rain fell from the sky. For I suffered the pangs of death in order that I might be imitated, however lovable are the tears, and however acceptable to Me.

THE SERVANT: Alas, gentle Lord, inasmuch as a beautiful imitation of Thy gentle life and of Thy loving Passion is so very dear to Thee, I will in future strive rather after a loving imitation than a tearful lamentation, although according to Thy words, I should do both. And therefore teach me how to resemble Thee in this suffering.

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: Break thy pleasure in frivolous seeing and idle hearing; let love taste good to thee, and take pleasure in what has been distasteful to thee; give up for My sake all bodily luxury. Thou shalt seek all thy rest in Me; love bodily discomfort, suffer evil willingly, desire contempt, renounce thy desires, and die to all thy lusts. That is the beginning of the school of Wisdom, which is to be read in the open and wounded book of My crucified body. And look, even if man does all that is in his power, can anyone in the whole world do for Me what I have done for him?

CHAPTER FOUR

How very loving His Passion was

THE SERVANT: Lord, when I forget Thy glory, Thy gifts, Thy help, and all else, there is still one thing that affects me deeply: and that is, when I consider not only the manner of our redemption, but also the most loving manner in which it was wrought. Lord, many a man gives to another in such a way that one understands his love and loyalty better by the manner of giving than by the gift itself. A small gift bestowed in a loving spirit often does more good than a great one without it. Lord, not only is Thy gift great, but the manner of giving it also seems to me to be profoundly loving.

Not only hast Thou suffered death for me, but Thou hast also sought out the innermost, highest, most hidden things of all love, in which one can or may choose suffering. It is as if Thou hadst said: 'Look, all hearts, was ever any heart so full of love? Look, if all My members were the noblest I have, that is the heart, I would allow it to be pierced, and destroyed, and torn open, and cut into small pieces, in order that nothing in Me or of Me might remain ungiven, that you¹ might know My love.' Ah, Lord, how didst Thou feel, or of what didst Thou think? For wilt Thou not grant that I may inquire further?

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: No thirsting mouth ever longed for a cold spring so yearningly; no dying man ever longed so much for the happy days of life, than I longed to help all sinners, and to make Myself loved by them. It would be easier to bring back again the days that are past, to make all withered flowers bloom again, or to collect all the little drops of rain, than to tell all My love to thee and to all men. It was for this

¹ Plural, agreeing with 'all hearts'.

that I poured Myself out so fully from My marks of love¹ that one could not have put a pin's point on My martyred body without touching one's own² mark of love.

See, My right hand was pierced by a nail, My left hand was transfixed, My right arm was stretched out, and My left most painfully twisted, My right foot was cut, and My left cruelly hacked through. I hung impotently, and My Divine legs³ were most weary. All My tender limbs were immovably riveted to the narrow halter. My hot blood burst out copiously through many a wound, in My anguish, so that My dying body was covered with blood, which was a distressful sight. Behold, a lamentable thing: My young, fair healthy body began to grow grey, to dry up and wither. The gentle weary back leant painfully on the rough cross, My heavy body sank down, My whole frame was bruised, wounded and cut through and through—and yet My loving heart bore all this lovingly.

¹ The bleeding wounds, or stigmata.

² There was a wound or scar for everyone.

³ *Bein* here does not mean 'bones'; Suso's Latin version (*Horologium Sapientiae*) has 'crura'.

CHAPTER FIVE

How the soul comes beneath the Cross to deep contrition and gentle forgiveness

THE SERVANT: Come now, my soul, forsake all outwardness, and collect thyself in the calm silence of true inwardness, in order that thou mayst set forth with all thy strength, lose thyself, and go astray in the vast wilderness of an immeasurable grief, on the high rocks of ever-present anguish, and cry out with thy loving heart, so that it may resound over hill and dale, and rise high up through the air into the heavens, up to all the heavenly hosts, saying in thy lamentable voice: 'Ah, living stones, wild ridges, bright meadows! Who will help me so that the fervent fire of my full heart and the hot water of my sad sorrowing tears may wake you, that you may help me to lament the grief, and anguish beyond belief,¹ that fills my poor heart in secret?

Alas, Our heavenly Father had adorned me above all bodily creatures and chosen me Himself to be His gentle, beloved bride. Now I have lost Him! Alas, I have lost Him, I have lost my only chosen love! Alas, alas, woe to my wretched heart for ever! What have I done, what have I lost? I have lost myself and all the heavenly host. All that could give joy and happiness has eluded me! I sit naked, for my false lovers, my real betrayers—alas, what a foul crime—have falsely and basely forsaken me, and have snatched away from me all the riches with which my only love had adorned me! Alas, honour and joy and all consolation, how cruelly I have been robbed of them! For grief and sorrow will for ever be my comforters. Whither shall I turn? Has not the whole world deserted me, since I have forsaken my only love? Alas, alas, that ever I did

¹ Suso occasionally uses rhyme in this and other lyrical passages.

it! What a miserable hour it was! Look at me, meadow saffron, look at me, blackthorn, all ye red roses and white lilies, and see how entirely faded, withered and dried up is the flower that this world plucks! Now I must for ever die as I live, wither as I bloom, grow old in my youth, and sicken in the days of my health!

Alas, gentle Lord, but all that I suffer is to be held lightly as compared with this: I have angered Thy fatherly countenance; for this is hell to me, and a suffering above all others. Alas, Thou hast so lovingly anticipated my wishes, and so gently warned me, and so sweetly guided me, alas, that I should have forgotten all this so completely! Alas, to die! Alas, human heart, how much canst thou suffer! Alas, my heart, how hard thou art, that thou dost not break from grief! I was once called His dear bride; alas and alas for evermore, I am not worthy now to be called His poor laundress! I dare not raise my eyes again for bitter shame. My mouth must evermore be silent towards Him, in joy or sorrow. Alas, how narrow is this wide world for me! Alas, Lord, if only I were in a wild wood, where no one could see me or hear me, until I had cried out to all my heart's desire, in order that my poor heart might be relieved thereby, for other comfort I have none. Alas, to what hast thou brought me, O sin? Woe, woe, false world, to him that serves thee! How hast thou rewarded me, so that I am now a burden to myself¹ and to the whole world, and must ever remain so! Alas, if God could but see the mighty queens, the rich souls, who have become wise by the misfortunes of others, who have remained in their first innocence and purity of mind and body; how blessed are they in their ignorance! Alas, pure conscience, free, unbound heart, little thou knowest how things are with a sinful, burdened, depressed heart! Alas, for me, poor woman,² how well it was with me beside my husband, and yet then I knew it so little! Who will give me a piece of parchment broad as the heavens, the depth of the sea for ink, foliage and grass as pens, that I might fully write down my sorrow and the irrevocable grief that the painful parting from my Beloved has

¹ Job vii, 20.

² The soul is imagined as the bride of Christ.

caused me! Woe is me that ever I was born! What can I do but hurl myself into the abyss of wretched despair?

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: Thou shouldst not despair. For I came into the world for the sake of thee and of all sinners, to bring them back again to My heavenly Father, in beauty, clarity and purity as great as thou didst ever possess.

THE SERVANT: Alas, what is that which sounds so sweet to a lost, despised, abandoned soul?' •

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: Dost thou not recognize Me? Why hast thou sunk so low? Or hast thou lost thy senses from extreme grief? My gentle child, it is I, gentle, merciful Wisdom, who have opened wide the depths of boundless mercy which are hidden from all saints, to receive thee and all penitent hearts mercifully. It is I, the sweet one, who became poor and wretched that I might bring thee back to thy honour. It is I, who suffered bitter death, that I might again give thee life. I stand here, pale, covered with blood and yet loving, as I stood on the high gallows of the Cross, between the severe judgment of My Father and thee. It is I, thy brother; look, it is I, thy husband. I have so fully forgotten all that thou hast done against Me, as if it had never been, if thou wilt now but turn entirely to Me, and not part from Me. Wash thyself in My loving rosy-coloured blood, raise up thy head, open thine eyes, and be of good courage! Now take as a token of complete forgiveness My wedding ring on thy finger, thy best robe, shoes on thy feet,¹ and receive the sweet name of bride to have and to hold for ever.

Behold, I have earned thee dearly; therefore, if all the earth were a blazing fire, and in the midst there were a handful of tow, it would, by its nature, be less receptive of the fiery flames than the depth of My boundless mercy to a man who returns.

THE SERVANT: Alas, my Father, alas, my Brother, alas, for all that can delight my heart, wilt Thou have mercy upon me, an unworthy soul? Ah, what mercy, what boundless compassion! For this cause I fall at Thy feet, heavenly Father, and thank Thee from the depths of my heart, and pray Thee to look upon Thy loving only-begotten Son, whom Thou didst send

¹ St. Luke xv, 22.

to bitter death from love, and to forgive my great sins. Remember, heavenly Father, what Thou didst swear to Noah, saying: 'I will stretch out My bow in the heavens, I will behold it and it shall be a covenant between Me and the world.'¹

Ah, look at Him now, tender Father, how stretched out and torn asunder He is, so that one could number all His ribs and bones. Look, how love has turned His hue to red, green and yellow! Observe now, heavenly Father, how the hands and feet of Thine only begotten, loving Son are so painfully stretched; look at His rosy-coloured and tortured fair body, and forget Thine anger against me!

Remember, why art Thou called the merciful Father, the Father of mercy, unless it is because Thou dost forgive? That is Thy name. To whom hast Thou given Thy dearest love? To sinners! Lord, He is mine; He is truly ours! I place myself to-day in the protection of His outstretched naked arms, with a loving embrace from the depths of my heart and soul, and I will never again be separated from Him, either living or dead.

Therefore, honour Him to-day in me, and graciously forgive the sins by which I have at any time angered Thee. For it would seem more possible to suffer death than ever again to offend Thee gravely, my faithful, heavenly Father. For I do not lament so much any suffering or tribulation, either hell or purgatory, nor do they give such pain to my heart, as the thought that I have once angered Thee, or done Thee dishonour, my Creator, my Lord, my God and my Redeemer, ah, and all the joy and delight of my heart. Alas, could I but cry my sorrow through all the heavens, so that my heart broke in my body into a thousand pieces, I would do so gladly. The more completely Thou dost forgive my sins, the more am I grieved that I have been so ungrateful for Thy great goodness.

And Thou, my only comfort, gentle, fair Eternal Wisdom, how can I ever fully thank Thee for the immeasurable goodness, wherewith Thou hast by Thy wounds and pangs conciliated and healed the breach which all creatures together could not amend! And, therefore, my only joy, show me how to bear on my whole body the marks of Thy love,² to keep them at all times

¹ Genesis ix, 13.

² Cf. Galatians vi, 17.

in my remembrance, so that all this world and all the heavenly host may see that I am grateful for the boundless goodness that Thou hast shown me, poor lost soul, from Thy boundless, immeasurable goodness alone.

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: Thou shouldst give Me freely thyself and all that is thine, never to take it away again. All that is not needful should be left untouched by thee; then thy hands are truly nailed to My Cross. Step cheerfully into good works, and stand firm in them, then thy left foot is fettered. Establish and fasten thy unstable mind and wandering thoughts in Me, and then thy right foot is fixed to My Cross. Thy spiritual and physical powers are not to languish in lukewarmness; in My service they should be stretched and torn asunder, like My arms. Thy frail body should often be wearied in spiritual exercises, to the glory of My legs, and be powerless to carry out its own desires. Many an unknown suffering crushes thee to Me against the narrow halter of My Cross, through which thou wilt be lovable, and covered with blood, after My pattern.

The pangs of thy nature shall make Me fresh again; thy willing pain will be the bed of My weary back; thy vigorous resistance to sin shall lighten My mind; thy devout heart shall alleviate all My pain, and thy flaming heart shall kindle My loving heart.

THE SERVANT: Eternal Wisdom, fulfil now my good will, according to Thy highest glory and Thy dearest will, for in truth Thy yoke is gentle, and Thy burden is light.¹ This is known to all those who have felt it and have ever been overburdened with the heavy load of sin.

¹ Matthew xi, 30.

CHAPTER SIX

How deceitful is the love of the world, and how lovable God is

THE SERVANT:¹ Beloved One, if I leave Thee even for a short time, I am like a roe that has left its mother, and is being hard pressed by the hunt; it flees with sudden twists and turns, until it escapes to its lair. Lord, I am fleeing, I rush to Thee with fervent, burning zeal, as the stag to the living waters.² Lord, one single hour without Thee is a whole year. To be a stranger to Thee for one day is a thousand years to a loving heart. Ah, then, Thou branch of salvation, Thou May bough, Thou red blossoming rose-bush, open up Thy arms, scatter and spread the blossoming branches of Thy Divine and human nature! Lord, Thy face is so full of grace, Thy mouth so full of the words of life, all Thy ways are a pure mirror of all courtesy and gentleness! O Thou sweet sight beheld by all the saints, how blessed is he who is worthy of Thy sweet espousals!

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: Many men are called thereto, but few are chosen.³

THE SERVANT: Gentle Lord, are they then refused by Thee or Thou by them?

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: Lift up thine eyes and behold this vision.

The Servant looked up, and was afraid, and spoke with a deep sigh: O alas, beloved Lord, that I was ever born! Is it true, or am I dreaming? I saw Thee once before in such rich beauty and in such lovely gentleness; now I see nothing but a poor banished, wretched pilgrim, who stands pitifully leaning

¹ Omitted in some old manuscripts.

² Psalm xli, 1 (A.V. xlii, 1).

³ St. Matthew xx, 16; xxii, 14.

on his staff in front of an old ruined city. The moat is collapsing, the walls are in ruins, only here and there are the lofty gables of the old masonry visible. And in the town there is a vast crowd. Among the people there are many who seem like wild beasts in human form. The wretched pilgrim goes round and round, looking to see if anyone will stretch out his hand to him. Alas, I see the crowd ignominiously driving him away, and so preoccupied are they that they scarcely look at him. But there are some, albeit only a few, who give him their hand. Then the other wild beasts come and prevent it. Now I hear the wretched pilgrim groan piteously, saying: 'O heaven and earth, have mercy, since I have won this town so dearly and am treated here so ill, while those who have had no toil for its sake are received so kindly.' Lord, I saw this in a vision. O beloved God, what does this mean? Am I right or wrong?

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: This vision is one of pure truth. Hear a sad story, and may thy gentle heart have compassion. Lo, I am the wretched, banished pilgrim, whom thou sawest. I was once held in great honour in the city; now I am cruelly banished and driven hence.

THE SERVANT: O dear Lord, what is the city and who are the people in it?

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: The ruined city is earnest religious life, in which I was formerly served by all alike, and where men lived in such a holy and secure manner. This now begins to decay rapidly in many places. The moat begins to collapse, the walls to fall in ruin—that is to say, the devout obedience, the willing poverty, and secluded purity in holy simplicity, begin to decay, save in so far as some of the high edifices of outer behaviour for the sake of appearances are still to be seen. But the common people, the wild beasts in human form, they are the worldly hearts in conventual garb, who, in their vain activity of transient cares, drive Me from their hearts. When some, who stretched out their hands to Me, were dragged down by the others, that means, that the good will and beginnings of some men are perverted by the words and bad examples of others. The staff, on which I leaned as I stood before them, that is the Cross of My bitter Passion, by which I admon-

ish them at all times to think of it, and to turn to Me alone in the love of their hearts. But the wretched cries that thou didst hear signify that My death begins to cry here, and cries more and more against those in whose hearts neither My boundless love nor My bitter death can prevent Me from being rejected and driven out by them.

THE SERVANT: Alas, gentle Lord, how this cuts through my heart and soul, that Thou art so lovable, and yet in many hearts, with all Thy offers of Thyself, Thou art so very much despised! Ah, gentle Lord, but why wilt Thou offer Thyself to those who stretch out their hands to Thee in true loyalty and love, when Thou art in the wretched form in which Thou art rejected by the crowd?

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: Those who for My sake renounce earthly love, and receive Me alone with true loyalty and love, and remain steadfast, I will marry them here in My divine love, and at their death I will stretch out My hands, and will raise them up to the throne of My eternal glory, in the sight of all the heavenly host.

THE SERVANT: Lord, there are many of them who think that they want to love Thee, and yet they renounce not ephemeral love. Lord, they wish to be very dear to Thee, and yet they will none the less have worldly love.

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: That is as impossible as to press the heavens together and to confine them within a small nutshell. They justify themselves by fair words, they construct their houses on the wind, and build on the rainbow.¹ How could the eternal remain with the temporal, when one temporal cannot abide another? He manifestly deceives himself who thinks that he can put the King of Kings in a common tavern, or consign Him to a servants' lodging. He who would worthily receive the noble guest must keep himself in pure detachment from all creatures.

THE SERVANT: Ah, sweet Wisdom, how bewitched are they, since they do not see this!

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: They are afflicted with deep blindness; they have a very great impulse towards joy, which

¹ A proverbial expression.

nevertheless gives them neither pleasure nor complete happiness. Before one pleasure comes to them, ten sorrows meet them, and the more they pursue their desires, the more they remain unsatisfied. Behold, godless hearts must indeed live at all times in fear and terror. The short-lived joy that comes their way is quite bitter, because it is accompanied by hardship. They obtain it with toil, keep it with great anxiety; and ah, they lose it with great bitterness. The world is full of faithlessness, treachery and inconstancy; for the end of self-interest is also the end of friendship. In short, no heart ever obtained joy or happiness, or unchanging peace of mind, in the creatures.

THE SERVANT: Alas, gentle Lord, what a distressing thing that is! Alas, there are so many noble souls, so many loving hearts, so many fair, delightful beings, made in God's image, who, married to Thee, might have been queens and empresses, and have held sway over heaven and earth! Alas, that they should so foolishly fall into confusion and degradation!

O, the pity of it, gentle Lord, that they should perish so willingly; for, as Thou hast truly said, it would have been better for them that their souls should be cruelly separated from their bodies,¹ than that Thou, who art eternal life, shouldst be forced to depart from the soul in which Thou findest no place. Alas, ye arrant fools, how greatly your loss increases! Alas, that you should let the fair, noble, delightful time pass by, which you can scarcely, if ever, bring back again, and that you should bear yourselves so gaily here below, as if it were nothing to you! Alas, merciful Wisdom, if only they knew, if only they could feel!

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: Hear what is wonderful and sad. They know this; they feel it every hour, and yet they mend not their ways. They know, and yet they desire not to know. They cover up the defective ground with specious appearances, which are indeed far from the truth; as many of them find out at last, when it is too late.

THE SERVANT: Ah, tender Wisdom, why are they so senseless, or what does it mean?

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: They would fain avoid hard-

¹ Cf. St. Matthew xviii, 6.

ships which come from Me, and yet they fall into the midst of them. As they will not bear Me, who am the Eternal Good, nor My sweet yoke, they will be overburdened, by decree of My strict justice, by many a heavy load. They fear the frost and fall into the snow.¹

THE SERVANT: Ah, gentle, merciful Wisdom, remember that, without Thy strength, no one can do anything. I see no other help for them unless they raise up their wretched eyes to Thee, and fall before Thy gracious feet, with the bitter tears of their hearts, in order that Thou shouldst enlighten them, and relieve them of the heavy bonds with which they are bound.

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: I am at all times ready to help, if only they were ready for Me. I do not depart from them; they depart from Me.

THE SERVANT: Lord, it is painful to part for those who love.

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: That is true, were it not that I could and should lovingly take the place of all love in the heart of the beloved.

THE SERVANT: Lord, it is hard to forsake old habits.

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: But it will be far harder to suffer the torments to come.

THE SERVANT: Lord, perchance they are so well ordered in themselves that it does them no harm.

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: I was the best ordered, and yet the least loved. How can that life be well ordered which, by its very nature, leads the heart astray, confuses the mind, leads it away from fervour, and robs it of peace? It breaks open the gates behind which the spiritual life is hidden—that is, the five senses. It robs men of modesty, and brings boldness, loss of grace, and alienation from God, lukewarmness of the inward man, and idleness of the outward man.

THE SERVANT: Lord, they do not think that they are hindered so much, if perchance the one they love wears the religious habit.

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: At times a clear eye is as quickly blinded by white flour as by grey ash. See, was ever any human presence as free from harm as Mine with My beloved disciples?

¹ Job vi, 16. (The Authorized Version has a different reading.)

There were no unnecessary words, no idle gestures. They did not begin on the heights of the spirit, and descend into the depths of endless words. There was nothing but true earnestness and complete truth, without falsehood. And yet My bodily presence had to be withdrawn before they could receive the Spirit.¹ How great a hindrance then, can human presence be!

Before men are brought into themselves by one person, they are led out of themselves by thousands. Before they are once instructed with doctrine, they are often led astray by evil example. In short, just as the cold frost in May dries up and destroys the lovely blossom, even so does transient love dry up all godly zeal and religious discipline. And if thou shouldst still doubt this, look around thee in the fair flowering vineyards,² which were once so delightful in their first blossoming, and behold how withered and devastated they now are, so that now one sees little trace of fervent zeal or great devotion. And what causes an irrevocable loss is that these ways have become a habit and a conventional usage, which so secretly lay waste all spiritual blessedness. It is all the more harmful because it seems harmless.

How many noble gardens of spices² are there, which were beautifully adorned with lovely gifts, and were a heavenly paradise, in which God loved to dwell, and now through transient love they have become a garden of weeds! The place where once the roses and lilies grew is now choked with thorns, nettles and thistles; and, where the holy angels were wont to tread, the swine now root up the ground. Woe, woe, woe for the hour when we shall have to render an account of all idle words, all wasted time, all squandered wealth; when all idle words, spoken, thought or written, in secret or openly, will be read out openly before God and the whole world, and their meaning understood without concealment!

THE SERVANT: Ah, Lord, these words are so very sharp; it must indeed be a heart of stone that is not moved by them. Beloved Lord, there are now some hearts of so delicate a nature that they are more readily led by love than fear; and

¹ St. John xvi, 7.

² 'Vineyards' and 'gardens of spices' mean 'monasteries' and 'convents'.

since Thou, the Lord of nature, art not a destroyer of nature—Thou art the perfecter of nature¹—therefore, beloved Lord, bring these sad words to a close, and tell me how Thou art a mother of fair love, and how sweet Thy love is.

¹ Cf. St. Thomas, *Summa Theologica*, I, qu. 1, art. 8, ad 2: 'Since grace does not destroy nature, but perfects it.'

CHAPTER SEVEN

How lovable God is

THE SERVANT: Lord, I consider Thy loving invitation, when Thou speakest of Thyself in the Book of Wisdom: *Transite ad me omnes*, etc. Come to Me all ye that desire Me; by My fruits ye shall be filled. . . . I am the mother of fair love. . . . My spirit is sweeter than honey, and My inheritance above honey and the honeycomb. . . . Noble wine and sweet music rejoice the heart, but the love of wisdom is above them both.¹

Gentle Lord, Thou canst offer Thyself with such love and tenderness that all hearts should desire Thee, and have an ardent longing for Thy love. The words of love flow so full of life from Thy sweet mouth that they have wounded many hearts in the flower of their youth so deeply² that all transient love was completely extinguished in them. Ah, gentle Lord, my heart longs, my mind yearns; I should gladly hear Thee speak of it. Speak, then, my only chosen comfort, one little word to my soul, Thy poor handmaid, for under Thy shadow I have sweetly fallen asleep, but my heart is wakeful.³

ETERNAL WISDOM: Hearken, my daughter,⁴ and see; incline thine ear; withdraw whole-heartedly within thyself, forgetting thyself and all things.⁵

I am in Myself the incomprehensible Good, who has for ever been and always will be, who has never been expressed in words, nor ever will be. I can indeed make Myself felt within the hearts, but no tongue can properly express Me. And yet,

¹ Ecclesiasticus xxiv, 24-6; xl, 20.

² Suso applies the language of the medieval love-lyric to spiritual affection.

³ Canticles ii, 3; v, 2.

⁴ As Suso's works were chiefly read by nuns, this form of addressing the soul was not inappropriate.

⁵ Psalm xlv, 11 (A.V. xlv, 10).

since I give Myself, the supernatural, immutable Good, to every creature according to its power, in the manner in which it is receptive of Me, I will wind the sun's radiance in a cloth, and give thee the spiritual meaning in human words concerning Myself and My sweet love, thus:

I present Myself tenderly before the eyes of thy heart; now embellish Me and clothe Me spiritually, and array Me to thy heart's desire. Adorn Me with everything that can move thy heart to special love, and abundant delight. Behold, everything, indeed everything, that thou and all men could conceive of form, beauty or grace, is still more lovely in Me than one could express. It is through words of this nature that I make Myself known.

Now hear Me: I am of noble birth, of high lineage. I am the lovable Word of the Father's heart, whose eyes take blissful pleasure in the profound, loving fellowship of My natural Sonship, and His pure Fatherhood, and the sweet, ardent ascending love of the Holy Spirit. I am the throne of heavenly bliss, The crown of joy and happiness.¹ My eyes are so clear, My mouth so gentle, My cheeks are so bright and rosy, and all My person so fair and lovely and altogether perfect, that if, until the Last Day, a man were to remain in a fiery furnace, for the sake of a mere glimpse of Me, he would still not have deserved it.

See, I am so charmingly adorned in bright raiment, so beautifully surrounded with the variegated hues of living flowers, of red roses, white lilies, fair violets, and flowers of every kind, that all the lovely blossoms of the month of May, the green foliage of all bright meadows, the gentle flowerlets of all fair pastures, are like a rough thistle, as compared with My adornment.

In the Godhead I play a game of joy; it gives the angel host Of happiness the most. A thousand years do seem To them a fleeting dream.² All the heavenly hosts fix their eyes on Me with a new wonder, and gaze upon Me. Their eyes are fastened on Mine; their hearts are inclined towards Me; and their soul is bowed down to Me without intermission. Blessed be he who

¹ These sentences are rhythmical and rhymed in the original.

² Psalm lxxxix, 4 (A.V. xc, 4.) Another rhythmical, rhyming passage.

dances the dance of joy and heavenly bliss by My side,¹ who in complete security will pace, holding My fair hand, for all eternity! One little word, that sounds so clear from My sweet mouth, surpasses all the songs of angels, the melody of all harps, and of all sweet instruments. Ah, look, I am so dear to love, so lovely to embrace and so tender for the loving soul to kiss, that all hearts should be fit to break with longing for Me. I am gentle and companionable, and present at all times to the pure soul. I am secretly present at table, in bed, in the path and on the road. I turn hither and thither. There is nothing in Me that could displease; in Me there is every thing that is well pleasing, the heart's desire and the soul's wish. See, I am completely the pure Good. If anyone in this life obtains one tiny drop of Me, all the joys and pleasures of this world become bitterness to him, all riches and honour become dung² and an object of contempt. The dear ones are surrounded by My sweet love, and are swept into the only One, in a love without images or spoken words; they are swept away into the Good, from whom they emanated.

My love can also relieve the hearts of beginners of the heavy burden of sin, and give them a free, clean heart, and create in them a pure and blameless conscience. Tell Me, what is there in this world which could outweigh this alone? The whole world could not outweigh such a heart, for the person who gives his heart to Me alone lives happily, and dies safely; he has Heaven here and hereafter for ever.

Now look, I have said many words to thee, and stand in My lovely beauty unaffected by all of them as is the firmament by thy little finger, for eye never beheld it, and ear never heard it, and it could never come into any heart.³ But let this rough sketch serve thee as a distinction between My sweet love and false, transient love.

THE SERVANT: Ah, Thou gentle, lovely flower of the field,⁴ Thou dearly beloved of my heart, in the embrace of the arms

¹ The joys of heaven are symbolized by a dance.

² Cf. Philippians iii, 8.

³ Corinthians ii, 9.

⁴ Cf. Canticles ii, 1.

of the loving soul, how well known is this to him who has ever experienced Thee truly, and how strange it is to the man to whom Thou art unknown, whose heart and soul are still earthly!

Ah, beloved, incomprehensible Good, this is a beautiful hour, this is a sweet moment, in which I must disclose to Thee a hidden wound that my heart still bears from Thy sweet love. Lord, sharing in love is like water in fire; beloved Lord, Thou knowest that real fervent love cannot endure any duality.¹ Ah, gentle, only Lord of my heart and soul, this is why my heart so fondly desires that Thou shouldst have particular love and affection for me, and that Thy Divine eyes should take particular pleasure in me. Alas, Lord, Thou hast so many loving hearts, which love Thee dearly, and have much influence with Thee, alas, gentle, dear Lord, where am I in this regard?

ETERNAL WISDOM: I am a lover of such a nature that I am not compressed by unity, nor scattered by a number.² I am at all times fully concerned and occupied with thee, and endear Myself to thee alone, and accomplish all that affects thee, as if I were free of all other ties.

THE SERVANT: *Anima mea liquefacta est, ut dilectus locutus est.*³ Ah, whither have I been led away? How completely have I been captivated! How completely has my soul been melted away by the friendly, sweet words of the beloved One! Ah, turn Thy bright eyes away from me, for they have altogether overcome me.⁴

Where was there ever a heart so hard, a soul so cold and lukewarm, that it would not be softened and warmed by Thy sweet love on hearing Thy sweet, living, loving words, which are so extremely ardent? Alas, wonder of wonders, that he who could look at Thee with the eyes of his heart should not wholly melt away with love! Ah, how blessed is the lover who is called Thy lover and is so in reality! What sweet consolation and hidden love he may receive from Thee!

¹ It cannot endure a rival.

² His love is not diminished by being concentrated on one person nor dispersed by being extended to a multitude.

³ Canticles v, 6.

⁴ Ibid., vi, 4 (A.V. vi, 5).

CHAPTER SEVEN

Ah, sweet gentle maiden, Saint Agnes, the lover of Eternal Wisdom, how well thou couldst praise thy dear lover, when thou didst say: 'His blood has adorned my cheeks with the colour of roses.'¹ Ah, gentle Lord, if I were but worthy, if my soul could but be called Thy lover! See, if it were possible that all the pleasure, all the joy and love that this world can give were combined in one person, I would freely give him² up for this. Ah, blessed be he in God, who is called, and is, Thy lover! If one man had a thousand lives, he should risk them for the chance of winning Thee. O all ye Friends of God, all the hosts of heaven, and thou, dear virgin Saint Agnes, help me in my prayers to Him, for I have never truly known what His love is! Ah, my heart, discard, abandon all idleness, and see whether before thy death thou canst come to experience His sweet love! How idly and slothfully hast thou lived hitherto!

Alas, gentle, fair, beloved Wisdom, thou knowest full well how to be a delightful love above all the loves of this world! How different is Thy love from that of the creatures! How deceitful is everything that seems lovely in this world, and thinks it is anything, when once one begins to know it rightly and close at hand. Lord, wheresoever I turned my eyes, I found always a *nisi* and an *unless*; for, if there were a fair form, it lacked grace; if it were beautiful and lovely, it was devoid of good breeding; or if it had that also, I always found, either without or within, something that repelled all the feelings of my heart. On close acquaintance I found that it had an inner dissatisfaction with itself.

Ah, but Thou, Thou beauty with boundless loving-kindness, grace with perfection of form, words and melody, nobility with virtue, riches with power, freedom within and clarity without, and a quality that I never found in the world, namely, a true recompense and satisfaction in knowledge and power for the longing desires of a truly loving heart. The better one knows Thee, the more one loves Thee, the more intimate one is with Thee, and the more lovely one finds Thee. Indeed, what an in-

¹ From the second antiphon of the second nocturne of the Office of the Feast of St. Agnes.

² In the original the pronoun is common gender: 'him' or 'her'.

exhaustible, complete, pure Good Thou art! Look, all ye hearts, how deluded are those who place their love in aught else! Ah, ye false lovers, flee far from me, never again approach me, for I have chosen the only love of my heart, in whom alone heart, soul, desire and all my powers are satisfied with spiritual love that never dies away! Alas, Lord, if I could but write Thee upon my heart, if I could but engrave Thee in the very depths of my heart and soul in golden letters, so that Thou wouldst never be erased in me! Alas, to my sorrow and misfortune I have not always occupied my heart with Him! What have I gained from all my lovers but lost time, wasted words, an empty hand, few good works, and a conscience burdened with sin!

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: I anticipate those that seek Me, and receive with lovely joy those that desire My love. All of My sweet love that thou canst experience in this world is only a drop in the ocean, as compared with the love of eternity.

CHAPTER EIGHT

An answer to three points which might above all repel a lover with regard to God. The first is: How can He appear so angry, although He is so lovable?

THE SERVANT: Ah, gentle Lord, I am deeply perplexed about three things. The first is this: that Thou art so extremely lovable in Thyself, and yet so very severe a judge of sin. Lord, when I consider Thy terrible justice, my heart cries out with a yearning voice: 'Woe, woe to all those who have ever sinned, for if they knew the strict judgment that Thou dost silently enforce, without any contradiction, for each and every sin, even from Thy dearest friends, they ought rather to tear out their own teeth and their hair than ever to make Thee angry.

Alas, Thy wrathful countenance is so terrible, Thy indignant rejection is so unbearable; woe is me, and Thy hostile words are so very fiery, that they pierce right through the heart and the soul. Alas, Lord, protect me from Thy angry countenance, and do not save up Thy wrath against me till the world to come.¹ See, if I have but a suspicion that Thou hast turned away Thy face in indignation from my guilty errors, it is so unbearable for me that nothing in this wide world is so very bitter for me. Ah, Lord, and my faithful Father, how then could my heart ever bear Thy terrible countenance?

Ah, when I think aright of Thy face distorted by wrath, my soul is so completely terrified, my whole strength is so shattered, that I can compare nothing with it, except the sky, when it begins to darken and grow black, and the lightning rages in the clouds, and a heavy peal of thunder tears the clouds asunder, shaking the earth and then shooting fiery arrows at a man.

¹ *Ene welt* (jene Welt), the next world.

Lord, let no one trust Thy silence, for indeed Thy quiet silence gives place at last to a grim thunder-clap. Lord, Thy wrathful countenance, Thy fatherly anger, is indeed a hell above all hells to a man who fears to anger Thee and to lose Thee, to say nothing of the terrible countenance that the wicked must behold, in the sorrow of their hearts, at the Last Day. Woe, and ever woe, to those who have to encounter this great grief! Lord, this causes great perplexity in my heart; and yet Thou sayest that Thou art so lovable!

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: I am the unchangeable Good; I am, and remain the same. But if I seem unequal, that is due to the inequality in those who see Me unequally, with sin and without sin. I am lovable by My nature, and yet a terrible judge of sin. I will have from My children childlike fear and affectionate love, in order that the fear may at all times preserve them from sin, and the love may unite them with Me in true fidelity.

CHAPTER NINE

The second: Why He so often withdraws Himself from His friends, as He thinks fit, and how one may recognize His real presence

THE SERVANT: Lord, everything is all that the heart could wish for, except one thing: Truly, Lord, when a soul is faint with longing for Thee, and for the sweet, loving converse of Thy presence, Lord, then Thou art silent, and speakest not a single word that one can hear. Alas, my Lord, is it not painful when Thou, gentle Lord, art the only chosen love of their heart, and yet dost behave like a stranger, and keep silence so completely?¹

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: Do not all creatures proclaim that it is I?²

THE SERVANT: Ah, Lord, this is not enough for a longing heart.

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: Yet every word that is spoken of Me is a messenger of love to their hearts, and every word of Holy Scripture that was written of Me is a sweet love-letter, as if I Myself had written it. Should not this suffice for them?

THE SERVANT: Ah, gentle, fair Beloved, Thou knowest full well that to a loving heart nothing is sufficient save its only love, its sole consolation. Lord, Thou art altogether such a dear, beloved, unfathomable Love. Lo, and even if all the tongues of angels spoke of Thee to me, unbounded love still struggles and strives for the One that it desires. A loving soul would rather have Thee than heaven, for Thou art its heaven. Ah, Lord, if I durst say so, Thou shouldst be a little more affectionate to the

¹ Cf. Isaiah xlv, 15.

² That I exist.

poor loving hearts that languish and long for Thee, that heave so many deep, unfathomable sighs for Thee, their only Love, that look up to Thee so wretchedly, saying with a voice full of feeling: *Revertere, revertere*,¹ talking to themselves and saying: 'Alas, dost thou think that thou hast angered Him, and that He will abandon thee? Dost thou think that He will ever again grant thee His loving presence, so that thou canst embrace Him with the arms of thy heart, and press Him to thy heart, so that all thy sorrow may disappear? Lord, Thou hearest all this, and Thou art silent!'

WISDOM asks: Now answer Me a question, after this searching for hidden things, what is it that, among all things, tastes best to the highest spirit?

THE SERVANT: Alas, Lord, I should like to know this from Thee; for the question is too high for me.

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: Then I will tell thee. Nothing tastes better to the highest angel than to fulfil My will in all things. And if he knew that my glory depended on rooting out nettles or other weeds, that would be to him the most desirable thing to accomplish.

THE SERVANT: Ah, Lord, how dost Thou strike at Me with this question! For Thou meanest that I should keep myself free and self-abandoned in all desires, and seek only Thy glory in hardships, as also in sweetness.

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: An abandonment above all abandonment is to be abandoned in abandonment.²

THE SERVANT: Alas, Lord, it is so very painful.

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: Where does virtue better prove its worth than in adversity? But know, that I often come and ask to be admitted into thy house, yet I am refused. Often I am received as a pilgrim, and am unworthily treated and swiftly cast out. But I come to My beloved Myself, and have loving converse with her. Yet that takes place so secretly that it is completely hidden from all men, except only those who are so fully detached and who take heed of My ways, who are on the

¹ 'Return, return.' Canticles vi, 12 (A.V. vi, 13).

² The highest spiritual merit is acquired by submitting patiently to God's absence.

look-out how to satisfy My grace. For I am, according to My Divinity, a pure essential spirit, and am received spiritually by pure spirits.

THE SERVANT: Gentle Lord, methinks Thou art withal a secret lover; therefore I pray Thee to give me some signs of Thy true presence.

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: Thou canst recognize My true presence in no better way than this: when I conceal Myself, and withdraw what is Mine from the soul, then thou wilt for the first time perceive Who I am, and who thou art. I am the eternal Good; without this Good no one has anything good; and for this reason, when I, the eternal Good, pour Myself out so kindly and graciously, then everything to which I come is made good. By this means can My presence be recognized, as the sun is recognized by its brilliance, which, nevertheless, one cannot see in its substance. If thou hast ever felt Me, enter into thyself, and learn to distinguish roses from thorns, and to pick flowers out of the grass.¹

THE SERVANT: Lord, truly, I seek and find in myself a very great inequality.² When I am abandoned,³ my soul is like a sick man to whom nothing tastes good, to whom everything is repugnant; my body is weary; my mind is heavy; inwardly there is hardness, outwardly sorrow. At such times I am vexed by everything I see or hear, however good it is; for all sense of fitness deserts me. I am inclined to error, weak to resist my enemies, cold and apathetic towards all that is good. Whoever comes to me finds an empty house, for the host is not at home, who gives good counsel, and by whom the whole household is made cheerful.

But Lord, when the bright morning star rises in the midst of my soul, then all sorrow vanishes, all darkness disappears, and bright clarity arises. Lord, my heart rejoices, my mind is glad, my soul is cheerful; I have a gay, festive⁴ feeling, and all that is in me and is mine joins in Thy praise. Whatever had been hard,

¹ Roses and flowers represent the divine, thorns and grass the human.

² A contradiction.

³ By God.

⁴ *Hobzeit* in mediaeval German means, not 'wedding', but 'festival'.

toilsome, or even impossible, now becomes most easy and sweet. Fasting, watching, praying, suffering, abstinence, and all kinds of austerities are become as nothing in Thy presence. Then I obtain great courage, which, however, deserts me in abandonment.¹

My soul is transfused with clarity, truth, and sweetness, so that it forgets all its troubles. My heart can sweetly meditate, my tongue can speak of lofty things, my body can attack every task with ease, and, if anyone but asks, he can obtain all the lofty counsel he desires. I feel then as if I have passed beyond the bounds of time and space, and stand in the antechamber of eternal bliss. Ah, Lord, who will grant that it may last for long! For suddenly, in a moment, it flashes away, and then am I naked and forsaken; sometimes almost as if I had never enjoyed it, until after sore misery it comes back again. Ah, Lord, is it Thou, or is it I, or what is it?²

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: Thou art, and hast of thyself, naught but failings. It is I, and this is the play of love.

THE SERVANT: Lord, what is the play of love?

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: As long as the lover is with his beloved, he knows not how dear love is, but when the lover parts from his beloved, love feels how dear love was.³

THE SERVANT: Lord, a laborious task. Ah, Lord, are no men spared these vicissitudes in this world?

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: Very few men, for freedom from changeableness belongs to eternity.

THE SERVANT: Who are these men?

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: The purest of all, and those nearest to eternity.

THE SERVANT: Lord, who are they?

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: They are the men who have the most zealously put away all obstacles.

THE SERVANT: Gentle Lord, teach me how to bear myself in this respect, imperfect as I am.

¹ When the soul feels as if it were forsaken by God.

² What is it that is to blame for the loss?

³ A play upon words, since in German *lieb* means both 'love' and 'dear'. The lover is the soul, and his love is God.

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: In the good days thou shouldst consider the evil ones; and in the evil days forget not the good ones;¹ then neither elation in the presence (of God), nor depression in abandonment can injure thee. If on account of thy limitations thou canst not renounce Me joyfully, then wait patiently and seek lovingly.

THE SERVANT: Ah, Lord, long waiting is painful.²

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: He who will have a love in this world must endure joy and sorrow. It is not enough to give me part of the day; he must constantly remain in meditation who would feel God within, and hear His secret words, and understand His hidden thoughts.

Ah, how thou dost let thine eyes and thy heart rove around so carelessly, when thou hast before thee the lovable and eternal image that never turns away from thee for a moment. How thou dost let thine ears fail thee, while I say so many loving words to thee! How thou dost forget thyself so manifestly, when thou art so closely surrounded by the presence of the Eternal Good! What does the soul seek in anything external, when it carries the kingdom of heaven hidden within itself?³

THE SERVANT: Lord, what is the kingdom of heaven that is in the soul?

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: That is justice and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.⁴

THE SERVANT: Lord, I recognize from these words that Thou dost often act in the soul in mysterious ways, in ways that are quite concealed from it, and that Thou dost draw the soul in secret, and lead to love and knowledge of Thy high Divinity the soul, which was once only concerned with Thy sweet humanity.

¹ Ecclesiasticus xi, 27.

² Cf. Proverbs xiii, 12.

³ Cf. Luke xvii, 21.

⁴ Romans xiv, 17.

CHAPTER TEN

Thirdly: Why God permits His friends to suffer so much in this world

THE SERVANT: Lord, there is a question in my heart. Dare I say it to Thee? Ah, sweet Lord, if only I durst dispute with Thee concerning Thy judgments, as the holy Jeremiah did!¹ Gentle Lord, be not angry with me, and listen to me patiently! Lord, they say: However deep and sweet are Thy love and friendship, Thou dost sometimes allow Thy friends to undergo many grievous and bitter sufferings, with the scorn of the whole world, and many tribulations, both outward and inward. For, when a man begins to enter into Thy friendship, the first step he has to take is to prepare himself for suffering, and to summon his resolution. Lord, I ask Thee by Thy goodness, what joy can they have in this, or why dost Thou permit Thy friends to suffer all this? Or wilt Thou not deign to let me know?

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: As My Father loves Me, even so do I love My friends; I act towards My friends now as I have always done, from the beginning of the world until the present day.²

THE SERVANT: Lord, it is just that of which men complain, and they say the reason why Thou hast so few friends is because Thou dost permit them to have such an ill life in this world. Lord, for this reason there are many of them who, when they obtain Thy friendship, and are about to be tested by suffering, forsake Thee, and, alas, I must say it with deep sorrow and

¹ Jeremiah xii, 1.

² St. John xv, 9. In the ninth chapter of the *Horologium Sapientiae*, Suso develops this argument further: Christ's life was full of suffering, and the servant is not greater than his lord.

heartfelt tears, they then relapse into the ways they had abandoned for Thy sake.

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: This is the complaint of men who are weak in faith, and poor in works, lukewarm in life, and of an undisciplined spirit. But thou, beloved, be of good cheer, rise out of the mud and the deep mire of worldly pleasure. Unlock thy inner senses, open thy spiritual eyes, and behold. Observe what thou art, and where thou dost belong. See, and then wilt thou comprehend that I act towards My friends in the most loving manner.

In thy natural being thou art a mirror of the Deity, thou art an image of the Trinity,¹ and a type of eternity. And just as I, in My eternal uncreatedness, am the Good that is infinite, in the same way thou art boundless in thy desires; and, just as a tiny raindrop can add but little to the vast depth of the ocean, all that the world can offer would be even so ineffective for the realization of thy desires.

Thou art in this wretched vale of tears, wherein are mingled joy and sorrow, laughter and tears, gladness and sadness, and wherein no heart ever realized complete happiness; for it cheats and deceives us, as I will tell thee; it promises much and fulfils little; it is short, inconstant and changeable. Much joy to-day, but sorrow Fills the heart to-morrow:² That is the way of the world.

¹ The higher faculties of man: will, memory and thought, form a trinity (St. Augustine, *De Trinitate*, ix, 3.) St. Thomas speaks of memory, intelligence, and will.

² The rhyme occurs here in the original, cf. pp. 59 and 72 above.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Of the never-ending pangs of hell

Ah, my chosen One, look now from the depths of thy heart at this lamentable and mournful sight. Where are now all those who hitherto have settled down in rest and pleasure in this world, in luxury and bodily ease? Ah, alas, what avails them all the joy in the world, which will pass by so quickly in the short time, as if it had never been? How swiftly the pleasure is over, the pain of which must last for ever and ever! O stupid fools, where are now the words you spoke so gaily: 'Come, friends, let us be merry. Let us take our leave of sadness, And give ourselves to joy and gladness.' What do all the joys you ever had avail you now? Well might you cry out with a lamentable voice: 'Woe, woe and woe for ever to us, that we were ever born into this world! How the short time has deluded us, how death has pounced on us unawares!

'Alas, has anyone else on earth been deceived as we poor wretches have been? Or is there anyone who will learn sense from the troubles of others? If a man had the sufferings of all men for a thousand years, that would be like a moment, as compared with this. Alas, how happy is he who never sought joy against God's will, who for His sake never had a happy day in the world.¹ We senseless fools thought that they² were forsaken and forgotten by God. Ah, how lovingly has He now embraced them in His eternity, and placed them so high in honour before all the heavenly host! How could they be injured by all the sufferings and scorn that have brought them so great happiness? But how completely all our joy has disappeared!

¹ Who for His sake renounces all happiness.

² The righteous.

‘Ah, sorrow and misery, it must indeed last for ever! Alas, for ever and ever: where art thou?¹ Alas, end without end, alas, death worse than all deaths, to die every hour and yet never to be able to be dead! Alas, father, mother, and all our dear ones together, farewell for evermore, for we shall never again see you happy; we must indeed be parted from you for evermore! Alas, what a parting, a parting that lasts for ever, how painful it is! Alas, the beating of hands, the gnashing of teeth, the sighing and the weeping! Alas, to howl and cry, and never to be heard! Our wretched eyes can never see anything but pain and anguish; our ears hear nothing but lamentation and woe. Alas, all ye hearts, have pity on this eternity of misery, and take it well to heart.

‘Alas and alas, O mountains and valleys, why do ye wait, why delay so long, why do ye spare us? Why do you not crush us to hide this miserable sight.² Alas, how different are the sufferings of this world from those of the next! Alas, O present, how thou dost blind and deceive! Alas, that we did not foresee this in the beautiful, delightful days, which we so wantonly wasted, which, alas, will never return! Ah, alas, if only we could have one brief hour of all the long lost years that are denied to us by the justice of God, and must for ever be denied without any hope of redress!

‘Ah, sorrow, and pain, and lamentation, for ever and ever, in this forsaken land, where we must be for ever bereft of all love, all comfort, and hope! Alas, we could have but one wish: if there were a millstone as large and wide as the whole earth, and so big that round about it would touch the heavens on all hands, and if a small bird were to come once in every hundred thousand years, and bite off a piece of the stone as large as the tenth part of a millet seed, and once again in a hundred thousand years the same amount, so that in a million years as much would have been pecked off the stone as the size of a whole grain of millet³—we poor wretches only ask that our eternal

¹ What is eternity, what does it mean?

² Cf. Hosea x, 8; St. Luke xxiii 30.

³ This story, recorded here for the first time in this precise form, became a very popular *exemplum*, or moral tale, from the fifteenth till the eighteenth century. For other examples, v. R. Köhler, *Germania*, pp. 305–7, Vienna, viii (1863.)

tortures would end as soon as the stone would come to an end—and that cannot be!’

See, this is the lamentable song that accompanies those who are the friends of this world.

THE SERVANT: Alas, strict Judge, how profoundly terrified my heart is! How my soul sinks down powerless with grief and compassion for these poor souls! Who is there in the whole world who is so wicked that, hearing this, he would not tremble at this terrible suffering? Alas, and alas, my only Love, do not forsake me! Alas, my only beloved and my only consolation, do not depart from me thus! Alas, should I ever at any time be thus parted from Thee, my only Love, of the rest I will be silent, alas, sorrow and grief, I had rather be tortured every day a thousand times. At the very thought of the parting, I am like to collapse with anguish. Ah, my Lord, gentle Father, do with me here as Thou wilt, I give Thee leave to do so freely, but spare me the lamentable separation from Thee, for I could not endure it at all.

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: Be not afraid! Those who are united in this world, remain undivided in eternity.

THE SERVANT: Ah, Lord, if only all men could hear this, all who still waste their fair days so foolishly, that they might see reason, and improve their lives, before the same fate also befalls them!

CHAPTER TWELVE

Of the boundless joys of heaven

ETERNAL WISDOM: Now raise up thine eyes, and see where thou dost belong. Thy home is the celestial paradise; here thou art a strange guest, an exiled pilgrim. And hence, as a pilgrim hastens home again, where his dear and beloved friends await him, and abide his coming with great longing, in the same way shouldst thou hasten to thy fatherland, ah, where they would see thee so gladly, where they long so deeply and sorely for thy cheerful presence, where they would welcome thee lovingly, receive thee tenderly, and invite thee to join their happy society for ever! See, and couldst thou but know how they yearn for thee, how they desire that thou shouldst fight bravely in suffering, and bear thyself like a true knight in all the adversities that they have overcome; and how they now with great joy remember the hard years that they had; couldst thou but know all this, all thy sufferings would be the easier. For the more bitterly thou hast suffered, the more nobly wilt thou be received.

Ah, how pleasant is the honour, how joy transfuses the heart and mind, when the soul is so gloriously extolled, lauded and praised before My Father and all the heavenly host, because it has suffered so much here in this time of struggle, fought so much and conquered so often, which is so strange a thing to many who have been without suffering! How wondrously the crown will shine that has been won so dearly here! How bright and glorious are the wounds and scars which have been received for love of Me! See, thou shalt be so well befriended in thy fatherland that the greatest stranger among the vast number will love thee more affectionately and faithfully than any father or mother ever loved their beloved only child in this world.

THE SERVANT: Alas, Lord, may it please Thy goodness, if I but durst make bold to ask Thee to tell me more of this fatherland, that I may long for it the more, and the better bear all sufferings! Alas, my Lord, what is it like in that land, and what do they do there? And are there perchance many of them, and do they know how things are here, as Thy holy Word informs us?

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: Now set out with Me, I will lead thee thither in meditation, and will give thee a distant glimpse, in the form of a rough parable.

See, above the ninth heaven,¹ which is infinitely more than a hundred thousand times larger than the whole earth, there is another heaven, which is called *coelum empyreum*, the heaven of fire, not because of the fire, but because of the immense shining brightness, immovable and incorruptible, that is its nature. And this is the court of glory, in which the morning stars praise Me together, and all the children of God rejoice.² Here are the eternal thrones, surrounded by ineffable light, by which the evil spirits are banished, where dwell the elect.³ See, the fair city shines with inlaid gold, it glows with noble pearls, set in precious stones, clear as crystal,⁴ reflecting red roses, white lilies, and all kinds of living flowers. Now, look thyself at the fair heavenly meadow, ah, the whole joy of summer is there, the fields of bright May, the valley of true happiness! Here one sees the happy glances exchanged by lovers; here are harps and fiddles; here they sing, and leap and dance, and play all joyful games. Here there is abundant joy, gladness without sadness, for ever and a day.⁵ Now look around thee at the countless multitude, how they drink of the living sparkling fountain to their heart's desire! Look, how they gaze at the pure, clear mirror of the naked Godhead in which all things are made known and revealed!

Pass on farther, and see how the sweet Queen of the celestial country, whom thou so dearly lovest, hovers with dignity and

¹ In mediaeval cosmogony the ninth is usually regarded as the highest.

² Job xxxviii, 7.

³ Those saints who have been allowed to take the place of the fallen angels.

⁴ Apocalypse xxi, 10-11, 18-19, 21.

⁵ This is a rhythmical passage, full of traditional poetic phrases.

joy above all the heavenly host, bending tenderly down to her Beloved,¹ surrounded by flowers, by roses and lilies of the valley.² Look, how her lovely beauty gives bliss and joy and wonder to all the heavenly host. Ah, see a vision now that will rejoice thy heart and soul; see how the Mother of Mercies has turned her eyes, those mild, merciful eyes, so gently towards thee and towards all sinners, and how powerfully she protects them and reconciles them with her beloved Son.

Now turn with the eyes of pure intelligence, and see also how the high Seraphim and the loving souls of this choir ascend towards Me unceasingly in ardent flames; how the bright Cherubim and their company receive a clear influx and outpouring of My eternal and incomprehensible light; how the high Thrones and their host rest sweetly in Me, and I in them. Then see how the three choirs of the second hierarchy, the Dominations, Virtues, and Powers, in orderly manner, establish the fair, eternal order of the natural universe. See, also, how the third host³ of angelic spirits carries out My errands and My laws in the various parts of the world. Ah, now observe, in what profound beauty and variety the vast host is ordered, and how lovely a sight it is!

Then turn thine eyes, and see how My chosen disciples and My very dearest friends sit in such great peace and honour on the judges' seats of honour, how the martyrs shine in rosy garments, the confessors glow in verdant beauty,⁴ how the gentle virgins are resplendent in angelic purity, how all the heavenly host is suffused by Divine sweetness. Ah, what a company, what a happy land! Blessed is he that ever he was born, who is to live here for ever!

See, into this country I lead My dear spouse home, on My arm, back from exile, with the great riches of her bounteous dowry. I adorn her inwardly with the fair garment of the light of glory, that raises her up above all her natural strength. She is outwardly clad in the transfigured body, which is seven times as

¹ Canticles vii, 5.

² Canticles ii, 1.

³ The Principalities, Archangels, and Powers.

⁴ Green was the colour of vestments used on festivals of confessors, in some dioceses, in the fourteenth century.

bright as the sun's beams, swift, subtle, and impassible.¹ I place on her head a fair golden crown, and thereon a golden halo.²

THE SERVANT: Gentle Lord, what is the dowry, and what is the crown and the bright halo?

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: The dowry is a clear view of that which here thou canst only believe, a present grasp of that which here thou dost hope, and a loving, joyful enjoyment of that which here thou dost love. So the fair crown is the essential reward, but the bright halo is the accidental reward.³

THE SERVANT: What is that, Lord?

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: Accidental reward depends on the particular joy which the soul obtains from special noble actions, with which it has conquered here,⁴ as with the learned doctors, the strong martyrs, and the pure virgins. But essential reward lies in the contemplative union of the soul with the naked Godhead, for it will never rest until it is led above all its powers and strength, and brought into the essential nature of the Persons, and into the simple purity of the Being. And it is in this object⁵ that it⁶ finds satisfaction and eternal bliss. The more detached the going-out, the more free the ascension; and the more free the ascension, the deeper the penetration into the wild desert and the profound abyss of the pathless Godhead,⁷ into which it sinks, is swept away, and united, in such a way that it cannot will anything but what God wills; and that is to be the same as God is; that is, that they are blessed by grace, as He is blessed by nature.

Ah, now lift up thy face joyfully, forget for a while all thy sorrow, cool thy heart in this dark stillness with the dear company that thou dost so mysteriously behold, and see how rosy, how most lovely, the faces look that here were so often red with shame for My sake. Lift up a cheerful heart, and say: 'Where is now the bitter shame that penetrated your pure

¹ The transfigured body is not capable of suffering.

² Exodus xxv, 25.

³ St. Thomas, *Summa Theologica*, I, Qu. XCV, Art. 4.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Of contemplation.

⁶ The soul.

⁷ Typical mystical phraseology, such as is often used by Eckhart.

hearts so deeply? Where are the bowed heads, the downcast eyes; where are the suppressed heartfelt sorrows, the deep sighs, and the bitter tears? Where are the pale faces, the great poverty and privation; where is now the miserable voice crying: "Ah, Lord, alas God, how sad and sorrowful I am!" Where are all those who once despised and persecuted you?

No longer does one hear the words: 'Forward to the fight, on to the struggle, to the battle!' day and night, as do those who fight against the heathen.¹ Where are now the cries that you used to raise in your hearts a thousand times in the presence of grace: 'Art thou prepared to stand firm in abandonment?' One hears no more the wretched, lamentable cry that you used to raise: 'Alas, Lord, why hast Thou forsaken me?'² I hear a loving voice sounding in your ears: 'Come to Me, My beloved, and possess the eternal kingdom which was prepared for you from the beginning of the world.'³ Where are all the suffering, pain and discomfort that you ever had on earth?

Ah, God, how all that has gone by, as swiftly as a dream, as if you had never had any sorrow. Ah, gentle God, how Thy judgments are hidden from the world!⁴ Ah, ye chosen ones, there is no need now to steal into corners, and hide from the senseless raging of others. Alas, if all hearts were one heart, they could not realize the great honour, the immense dignity, the praise, the glory, that you are to have for ever and ever! O ye princes of heaven, ye noble kings and emperors, ye eternal children of God, how lovely are your faces, how happy your hearts, how joyful your souls, how cheerfully your voices resound in the song: 'Ah, ah, thanks and praise, salvation and blessing, grace and bliss and everlasting honour from the bottom of our hearts be to Him through whose grace we have possessed all this, ever and eternally!'⁵ See, here is your country, here is perfect peace, here is heartfelt jubilation, here is boundless, everlasting praise!

THE SERVANT: Ah, wonder above all wonders, ah, unfath-

¹ In the Crusades.

² St. Mark xv, 34.

³ St. Matthew xxv, 34.

⁴ Cf. Romans xi, 33.

⁵ Cf. Apocalypse vii, 12.

omable Good, what art Thou? Ah, tender, fair, loving Lord, how good it is to be here! Ah, my only love, let us remain here!

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: The time has not yet come to remain here. Thou must first fight many a bold fight. This glimpse is only granted thee so that thou canst swiftly turn to it in all thy sufferings—see, thou canst never lose heart again now—and forget all thy pain, and as an answer to the complaints of men without understanding who say that I deal unkindly with My friends. Now look, what a difference there is between My friendship and that of the world, and indeed how passing well I treat My friends—I will say nothing of the great grief, the toil, and of many severe sufferings, in which they swim and watch day and night, but they are so blinded that they do not understand it. For it is My eternal decree that a disorderly mind should be a torture to itself and a severe punishment.¹ My friends have bodily discomfort, and yet they have also peace of mind; but the friends of this world seek bodily comfort and obtain discomfort of heart, soul and mind.

THE SERVANT: Lord, they are foolish and mad, who, because Thou hast few friends, always compare Thy true friendship with that of the false world—for that is the fault of their great blindness—and who are for ever complaining of some suffering or other. Ah, how loving Thy paternal rod is in very truth! Blessed is he whom Thou hast never spared with it!² Lord, I now see full well that suffering is not due to harshness; it comes from loving tenderness. Let no one say again that Thou hast forgotten Thy friends! Thou hast forgotten those—for Thou hast despaired of them—whom Thou hast spared suffering here. Lord, they should never again have good days, or joy, or comfort here, whom Thou wilt save hereafter from eternal distress, and to whom Thou wilt give everlasting joy. Ah, Lord, grant that these two visions may never leave the eyes of my heart, and that I may never lose Thy friendship.

¹ Cf. St. Augustine, *Confessions*, i, 12.

² Cf. Proverbs iii, 11-12.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Of the incomparable nobility of temporal suffering

Gentle Lord, tell me now, what was the suffering Thou didst have in mind as being so passing wholesome and good? How eagerly I wish that Thou wouldst tell me more of it, so that, if Thou shouldst send it to me, I would accept it happily and cheerfully as from Thy paternal hand!

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: I mean every suffering, whether it be willingly accepted or unwillingly encountered, in which a man makes a virtue of necessity,¹ so that he would not be rid of it, unless it were My will, but he orders it to My eternal glory with loving, humble patience. The more willing the acceptance, the nobler it is, and the more acceptable to Me. See, hear more of such sufferings, and write it in the bottom of thy heart, and keep it as a sign before the spiritual eyes of thy soul.

My dwelling is in the pure soul, as in a paradise of all bliss, therefore I cannot endure that it² should fall back upon aught else with joy and pleasure. By its nature it is inclined to harmful pleasure, so I block up all the roads with thorns;³ I stop up all the gaps with hardships, whether it likes it or not, lest it should escape Me. I strew all its ways with suffering, so that it can never put down the foot of its heart's desires anywhere save in the sublimity of My divine nature.

See, if all hearts were one heart, they could not bear in time⁴ the least reward that I will give in eternity for the least suffering that a man endures from love for My sake. This is My eternal

¹ This familiar phrase, known to us from Chaucer and Shakespeare, was first used in the Middle Ages. The earliest known example is in Matthew Paris (c. 1250).

² The soul.

³ Hosea ii, 6.

⁴ In this world.

decree in all Nature, from which I do not deviate: what is noble and good must be earned by adversity. He who remains behind, let him remain. Many are called, but few chosen.¹

THE SERVANT: Lord, it may well be that suffering is an incomparable good, when it is not immoderate, and when it is not so terrible and so incredible. Lord, Thou alone knowest all hidden things, and hast created all things in number and measure.² Thou knowest that my sufferings are beyond all measure, they are beyond my strength. Lord, if there be anyone in the whole world who continually has more painful sufferings than I, I cannot find him. How can I endure them? Lord, if Thou gavest me common sufferings, I could bear them, but I see not how I can ever endure the uncommon sufferings that so mysteriously constrict my soul and mind, as Thou alone fully knowest.

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: Every sick man thinks he is the most afflicted, and every beggar that he is the poorest of all. If I had given thee other sufferings, it would have been the same. Acquiesce freely in My will in all suffering that I wish thee to bear, without excluding this or that.³ Dost thou not know that I only wish for thy welfare, as kindly as thou thyself dost? It is I who am Eternal Wisdom, and I know best what is best for thee. Thou mayest well have felt that My sufferings penetrate much deeper and farther, and drive men more quickly,⁴ if they are not boldly faced, than all freely accepted sufferings. Why, then, dost thou complain? Say to Me: 'My most loving Father, do to me in all things as Thou wilt.'

THE SERVANT: Ah, Lord, it is so easy to say this, but the real thing is so hard to bear, for it hurts so very much.

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: If suffering did not hurt, it would not be suffering. There is nothing more painful than suffering, and nothing more joyful than to have suffered. Suffering is short pain and long joy. Suffering has this effect on him to whom suffering is suffering, that it ceases to be suffer-

¹ St. Matthew xxv, 16.

² Wisdom xi, 21.

³ Any kind of suffering.

⁴ Towards God.

ing.¹ If thou hadst so much spiritual sweetness and Divine consolation and pleasure that at all times thou didst flow with heavenly dew, this would not in itself be praiseworthy; because for all this together I should not owe as much to thee, it would not make Me thy debtor as much as a little loving suffering or patience in hardship, which thou didst suffer for the sake of love at My hands.

There are ten men who would turn back in great joy, and happy sweetness for every one who turns back in continuous suffering and tribulation. If thou hadst as much learning as all the astronomers, if thou couldst speak of God as well as the tongues of all men and angels, and if thou hadst all the masters' wealth of learning,² it could not further thee in good living as much as giving thyself to God and abandoning self, for the former³ is common to both good and bad men, but the latter⁴ belongs only to My elect. If anyone could rightly compare time and eternity, he ought to prefer to lie for a hundred years in a fiery furnace rather than to lack the smallest reward for the smallest suffering in eternity, for the former has an end, but the latter is without end.

THE SERVANT: Ah, sweet, loving Lord, what sweet lute's music this is to a suffering man! Lord, if Thou wouldst play to me on the psaltery so beautifully in my sufferings, I would gladly bear them, and then I should be better with my sufferings than without any suffering.

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: Now hear the sweet music of the lute of a God-suffering man;⁵ how full it seems, and how sweet it sounds. Suffering is an abomination to the world, and yet to Me it is an incomparable dignity. Suffering extinguishes My anger, and obtains My favour. Suffering makes men lovable to Me, for the suffering man is like unto Me. Suffering is a hidden good that no one can purchase; and if a man knelt before

¹ I.e. those to whom suffering really means something (who suffer acutely), finally obtain joy.

² I Corinthians xiii, 1-2.

³ Learning, skill, eloquence.

⁴ Suffering, self-abandonment.

⁵ Eckhart often uses such phrases. A God-suffering man is one who suffers patiently all the trials sent to him by God, or permitted by God.

Me for a hundred years, in return for the gift of suffering, he would not have deserved it. Out of an earthly man it makes a heavenly man. Suffering brings estrangement from the world, but it gives My continual presence. It lessens friends, but increases grace. He whose cause I kindly espouse, must be completely denied and deserted by the whole world. It is the safest way, and it is the shortest and nearest way. See, if anyone knew rightly how useful suffering was, he would accept it as a worthy gift from God. Ah, how many a man there is who was once a child of eternal death, and had fallen asleep into a deep slumber, whom suffering has revived and roused to a good life!

How many a wild animal and untamed bird there is, that is trapped by acute suffering as in a cage, and if anyone provided time and opportunity, it would escape from its eternal bliss!¹ Suffering saves us from heavy falls; it makes a man know himself, stand firm in himself, believe in his neighbour. Suffering keeps the soul humble, and teaches patience; it is a guardian of purity; it brings the crown of eternal bliss. There can scarcely be a man who does not receive some good from suffering, either in his sins, or as he begins or progresses in perfection, for it scourges the iron, purifies the gold, adorns the precious stones.² Suffering casts out sin, drives away temptation, diminishes purgatory, destroys faults, renews the spirit. It brings true hope, a clean conscience, and steadfast courage. Know that it is a wholesome drink and a healing herb, above all the herbs of paradise.

It mortifies the body, which after all must rot, but feeds the noble soul, which is to exist for ever. See, the noble soul grows by suffering, as the fair roses by the sweet dew in May. Suffering makes a wise man and a practised man. A man who has not suffered, what does he know?³ Suffering is the rod of love, the paternal chastisement of My elect. Suffering draws and compels men to God, whether they will or no. If anyone bears himself cheerfully in suffering, he is well served by joy and sorrow, by

¹ This loosely constructed sentence is translated literally.

² Iron typifies sinners, gold and precious stones those who are beginning or progressing, and those who are perfect in the spiritual life respectively.

³ Ecclesiasticus xxxiv, 9.

friend and foe alike. How often thou hast imposed iron bits on thy enemies that gnash their teeth at thee, and hast made them powerless by thy cheerful praise and meekness in suffering! I would rather create suffering from nothing than leave My friends to be without suffering; for in suffering all virtues are tempered, man is adorned, one's neighbour is improved, God is praised. Patience in suffering is a living sacrifice; it is a sweet odour of noble balsam before My Divine face; it is a conspicuous miracle before all the heavenly host. No brave knight in the tournament was ever so eagerly gazed at as all the heavenly host gaze at a bravely suffering man.

All the saints are the cup-bearers of a suffering man, for they have all tasted it once themselves, and they cry out with one voice that it is free from poison and a wholesome drink. Patience in suffering is greater than raising the dead, or working other miracles;¹ it is the narrow way that leads straight to the gate of Heaven. Suffering clothes the soul in a rosy red and purple garment. It bears a chaplet of red roses, a sceptre of green palms;² it is a glittering ruby in the brooch of a virgin. It leads the chorus in eternity with a sweet voice, singing a new song with a glad heart, such as the whole throng of angels could not sing, because they have never experienced suffering. In short, the sufferers are called 'the poor' by the world, and by Me they are called 'the blessed', for they are My elect.

THE SERVANT: Ah, how well it appears that Thou art Eternal Wisdom, since Thou canst so convincingly bring the truth into the open, so that no one can or may doubt it! It is no wonder that he to whom Thou canst make suffering so dear can gladly endure suffering. Lord, Thou hast brought it about with Thy sweet words, not only that all suffering will for ever be easier and more joyful, my Lord and faithful Father, I kneel to-day before Thee, and praise Thee fervently for present suffering and also for immense sufferings in the past, Which then appeared to me so great, Because they seemed a cruel fate.³

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: But how do they seem now?

¹ Gregory, *Dialogues*, i, 2.

² The red roses typify suffering; the palm branch, victory.

³ Note the use of rhyme here.

LITTLE BOOK OF ETERNAL WISDOM

THE SERVANT: Lord, verily I think now, if I look at Thee, Thou lovely joy of my eyes, with my loving eyes, that the great, severe sufferings, with which Thou hast in paternal fashion tried me, at the sight of which, when I underwent them, Thy friends were dismayed, that they were all like the sweet dew in May.

When the Preacher¹ had begun to write about suffering, he saw in a vision, in the same way as was described above,² that the two persons who had been in suffering and sorrow were sitting before him, and one of them asked him to play to them on the psaltery. He was annoyed at this request, and observed that it was not religious to do so. Then it was said that the music they had asked for was not unspiritual. And suddenly there was a youth there, who was tuning a psaltery, and when he had finished tuning it, he strung two threads over the strings crosswise, and handed it to the friar, and then he³ began to speak of suffering.

¹ Suso.

² See the Prologue, p. 45 above.

³ The friar, Suso.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Of the unspeakable benefits of the contemplation of Divine sufferings

THE SERVANT: Lord, truly, the infinite good that we find in Thy Passion, if we give it time and place, is concealed from all hearts. Ah, how sure a path is the way of Thy Passion, through the way of truth up to the highest peak of all perfection! Blessed art thou, noble light among the stars of heaven, Paul, who wert raised up so high, and led so deeply into the secret mystery of the pure Godhead, where thou didst hear the deep words that no one can utter.¹ Yet that lovely suffering above all others went so sweetly to thy heart that thou didst say: 'I know nothing but Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.'² Blessed be thou among teachers, sweet Saint Bernard, whose soul was so transfused by the purity of the Eternal Word, that thy sweet tongue sweetly poured out, like dew from a full heart, the story of the sufferings of His humanity, when thy loving soul spoke: 'I have lovingly grasped the blossoming branch of spikenard of the bitter Passion of My beloved Lord between my breasts, and tenderly pressed it into the midst of my heart. I do not seek, as does the bride, where He rests at noon,³ He whom I embrace in the depths of my heart. I do not ask where He eats at midday, whom my soul so lovingly contemplates on the Cross. The former⁴ is higher, but the latter⁵ is sweeter and more ready. In the loving Passion I obtain full compensation for my lack of merit. Therein lies full justice for me; I call this contemplation

¹ II Corinthians xii, 4.

² I Corinthians ii, 2.

³ Canticles i, 7, 12, 13.

⁴ The contemplation of Christ in glory.

⁵ That of Christ crucified.

eternal wisdom, the fullness of all knowledge, the riches of all salvation, a full abundance of all rewards. It moderates me in good fortune, and upholds me in adversity; it keeps me in a true balance between the joys and sorrows of this world, and preserves me from evil in full security. At times I have received therefrom a draught of His bitterness; and sometimes a drink of divine consolation and spiritual sweetness has been given me.¹

Ah, sweet Saint Bernard, is it not then fitting that thy tongue should overflow with sweetness, for thy heart was so much sweetened by His sweet Passion?

Eternal Wisdom, I notice now that whosoever desires to have great reward and eternal salvation, whosoever wishes for high knowledge and deep wisdom, whosoever would be equable in joy and sorrow, and have full security from all evil, and would receive a drink of Thy bitter Passion and extreme sweetness, he should at all times hold Thee, crucified Jesus, before the eyes of his heart.

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: Thou dost not rightly know what great good lies here. See, the diligent contemplation of My loving Passion makes of a simple man a high learned master. It is indeed a living book, in which one finds all things; how truly blessed is the man who has it at all times before his eyes and studies it! How much he can obtain of wisdom and grace, consolation and sweetness, divesting himself of all failings, and gaining My continual presence! And hear of one:

Many years ago it happened that a Preacher² at his beginning underwent a bitter attack of inordinate depression, which at times so overcame him that no heart could fathom it, unless it has experienced it. And once, when he sat thus in his cell, after collation, his sufferings had so overwhelmed him that he could neither study, nor pray, nor do anything good, but sit in his cell and put his hands in his lap, as if he would fain stay in his cell to the glory of God; since he was useless for any other spiritual work. As he sat there disconsolate, he seemed to hear words spoken to him in his imagination: 'Why dost thou sit here? Stand up, and give thyself up to My sufferings, and thus

¹ A free paraphrase of part of St. Bernard's forty-third Sermon on Canticles.

² A Dominican, i.e. Suso himself.

thou wilt overcome thy own sufferings!' And he stood up quickly, for he felt as if the words had been spoken from Heaven, and he gave himself up to the sufferings (of Christ), and in meditating on them he forgot all his own, to such an extent that never again did he feel anything of the kind.

THE SERVANT: Ah, my sweet Wisdom, Thou dost indeed know all hearts; Thou knowest that, above all things, I desire that Thy painful Passion should go to my heart more than that of all other men,¹ and that it should cause a flood of bitter tears to flow from my eyes, day and night. Alas, now my soul has a grave complaint, that it does not at all times pierce my heart so deeply, nor can I contemplate it so lovingly as would be worthy of Thee, gentle, beloved One. So teach me how to act.

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: The contemplation of My Passion should not be carried out in a hasty and perfunctory manner, when one happens to have time and occasion for it, but it should be done with fervent love and with sorrowful reflexion, for otherwise the heart remains as unaffected by devotion as the mouth with unchewed liquorice.

If thou canst not meditate on My Passion with eyes that weep because of the bitter anguish that I felt, thou shouldst ponder it instead with a cheerful heart, because of the joyful benefits that thou findest therein. If, however, thou canst neither laugh nor weep, thou shouldst meditate on it to My glory in the aridity of thy heart; and hereby thou wilt not achieve less than by overflowing with tears and sweetness, for in this way thou dost act from love of virtue, without consideration of self.²

And in order that it may touch thy heart more and more, hear this: My strict justice allows no injustice in the whole of nature, however small or great it may be, to escape punishment and expiation. How then should a great sinner, who has perhaps committed more than a hundred mortal sins, and who, according to the Scriptures,³ ought to do penance for every mortal sin for seven years, or complete the unaccomplished penance in the

¹ That he should feel it more deeply than anyone else.

² From St. Bernard's sixth Sermon for Quadragesima.

³ In the Middle Ages this term included, besides Holy Writ, the works of the Fathers and the Scholastics. Here St. Thomas is apparently meant.

fiery furnace of terrible Purgatory, ah, when would the wretched soul have fully completed its penance; when would its long pain and anguish come to an end?¹ Would it not be too long for the soul? See, it will be speedily punished and find satisfaction through My innocent blood and noble Passion. It can so easily seize the treasure of My acquired merit, and draw upon it. And if it had to burn in purgatory for a thousand years, it would in a short time have cleared off its guilt and penance, so that it would enter into eternal joy without any purgatory at all.

THE SERVANT: Ah, my gentle Eternal Wisdom, teach me, of Thy grace. How gladly I should like to seize the treasure!

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: It is done after this manner:

1. That a man should consider with a contrite heart, often and seriously, the greatness and number of his grave misdeeds, by which he has so manifestly offended the eyes of his heavenly Father.

2. After this he must hold as naught his own works of satisfaction, for they are reckoned against his sins as a little drop compared with the deep sea.

3. Then with cheerfulness he should consider the infinite greatness of My Atonement, for the least little drop of My precious blood, which flowed on all hands copiously from My loving body, could atone for the sins of a thousand worlds; and yet every man receives satisfaction for his sins in the same measure as he resembles Me in his imitation of My Passion.²

4. After this, a man should meditate and ponder, humbly and fervently, the smallness of his own expiation, and the greatness of Mine.

In short, know that all the masters of numbers and magnitudes³ could not compute the infinite good that is hidden in the fervent contemplation of My Passion.

THE SERVANT: Ah, gentle Lord, for this reason leave all conversation—I have wandered too far astray⁴—and open up to me more of the hidden treasure of Thy loving Passion.

¹ There is a sudden change in the construction of this sentence.

² St. Thomas, *Summa Theologica*, III, Qu. 49, Art. 3 ad 2.

³ Arithmeticians and geometricians.

⁴ Digressed.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

From the loving colloquy that the soul had with God at the foot of the Cross, it returns to His Passion

THE SERVANT: Thou hast revealed to me the infinite anguish that Thy outer man suffered on the high gallows of the Cross, how thoroughly tortured it was, and environed by the bonds of lamentable death. Ah, Lord, but how was it at the foot of the Cross, or was there anyone there whose heart was moved by Thy piteous death, or how didst Thou bear Thyself in Thy pain towards Thy sorrowful Mother?

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: Hear a sad story, and let it touch thy heart. When, as thou hast heard, I hung in their sight lamentably suspended, in all My anguish and deadly pangs, they faced Me, and called upon Me in mockery; they wagged their heads towards Me very scornfully;¹ they destroyed Me in their hearts completely, even as if I were an unsightly worm. But I stood firm at this, and prayed My dear Father for them lovingly. See, I, the innocent Lamb, was made equal to the guilty; I was mocked by one of them, but invoked by the other. I received him quickly, and forgave him all his sins; I opened to him the heavenly paradise.

Ah, listen to a lamentable story: I was looking around Me, and found Myself wretchedly forsaken by all men; and those friends who had followed Me stood far away from Me; My dear disciples had fled from Me. I stood thus, naked and robbed of all My clothing. I had become faint and defeated there. They treated Me unmercifully, but I bore Myself meekly, like a silent lamb.

I was surrounded by deep sorrow and bitter anguish, whither-

¹ St. Matthew, xxvii, 39.

soever I turned. Below Me stood My sorrowful Mother, and her maternal heart suffered to the full all that I was suffering in My body. My mild heart was thereby deeply moved, for I alone fully knew the great sorrow of her heart, saw her yearning gestures, and heard her lamenting words. I consoled her very kindly in the separation of death, and commended her maternal fidelity to My beloved disciple, and commended to her the disciple's filial affection.¹

THE SERVANT: Ah, gentle Lord, who can fail to sigh deeply or weep bitterly at this? Ah, fair Wisdom, how could they be so very harsh to Thee, the sweet Lamb; those raging lions, the murderous wolves, to ill-treat Thee so? Ah, alas, gentle God, if only Thy poor servant had been there, to take the place of all mankind; that I² could have stood before my Lord, or have gone to bitter death with my own Love, or if they would not slay me with my Love, that I might have embraced the hard rock³ on which Thy Cross stood with the arms of my heart, so that it⁴ would break from pity, and that my loving heart would also have broken with it for my Beloved.

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: It was My eternal decree that, at that hour, I should suffer the cup of My bitter martyrdom alone for all men. But thou, and all those who would follow Me, who deny yourselves, take now your cross upon you and follow Me!⁵ For this dying to self is as lovely to Me as if they had then entered into bitter death with Me.

THE SERVANT: Gentle Lord, now teach me how to die, and tell me what is my own cross, for indeed, Lord, I ought not to live any longer since Thou art dead to me.

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: If thou strivest to do the best that thou knowest, and in return receivest from other men scornful words and contemptuous gestures, and if they annihilate thee in their hearts so completely that they think thou neither canst nor darest revenge thyself, if thou not only standest firm and immovable in all this, but also prayest lovingly to

¹ St. John xix, 25-27.

² One of the rare occasions on which Suso speaks in the first person.

³ Of Golgotha.

⁴ The hard rock.

⁵ St. Matthew xvi, 24.

thy heavenly Father for them, and affectionately excusest them before Him; see, as often as thou diest to thyself from love, so often My death blossoms and blooms in thee.

If thou keepest thyself clean and innocent, and thy good works are so suppressed¹ that thou art reckoned among the guilty, to the joy of thy heart, if thou art swift to forgive wholeheartedly those who torture thee or demand thy injury, for all the distress that ever came to thee from them, as if it had never been, and if likewise thou art helpful and serviceable to them in word and deed, just as I forgave those who crucified Me, then art thou verily crucified beside thy Beloved. If thou canst renounce all human affection, help and consolation, save such as is bare necessity, then thy loss of love represents all those who forsook Me at that hour. Whenever thou art as free of all thy friends for My sake as if they did not belong to thee, in any respect in which a hindrance is possible,² then have I a dear disciple and brother standing below the Cross, and helping Me to bear My Passion. The untrammelled liberty of thy heart clothes and adorns My nakedness. Then, whenever in all the calamities which come to thee from thy neighbour, thou art overwhelmed, and whenever thou acceptest the raging anger of all men, from whithersoever it blows, howsoever swiftly it comes, whether thou be in the right or in the wrong, as meekly as a silent lamb, overcoming with thy sweet-tempered heart, and with thy meek words and kindly face, the malice of others: behold, then the true image of My death is being worked out in thee. Ah, when I find this likeness, how great is the joy and pleasure for Myself and My heavenly Father!

Bear thou My bitter death in the depths of thy heart, and in thy prayers, and in bringing forth good works: then thou wilt complete the distress and the faithful love of My pure Mother and of My dear disciple.

THE SERVANT: Ah, beloved Lord, my soul asks Thee to work out the image of Thy dolorous death in my body and soul, whether I will or no, to Thy greatest glory and Thy dearest

¹ Deliberately concealed by his enemies.

² In any circumstances in which friendship might be a barrier between the soul and God.

will. I ask Thee in particular to touch a little on the great grief of Thy sorrowful Mother, and tell me how she bore herself beneath the Cross.

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: Ask her thyself! ¹

¹ This forms the theme of Chapter XVII.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Of the worthy praise of the pure Queen of heaven

THE SERVANT: O high riches of Divine knowledge and wisdom, how unsearchable are Thy judgments, and Thy ways past finding out!¹ How many strange ways Thou hast to bring back poor souls! What wert Thou thinking, and what was in Thy mind, in Thy eternal immutability, when Thou didst so nobly create the pure, gentle, worthy creature, who is above all pure creatures?² Lord, well mightest Thou say: '*Ego cogito cogitationes pacis*. . . I think the thoughts of peace.'³ Lord, Thou hast out of the abyss of Thy essential Goodness reflected Thyself in her, once more leading all created beings back to their origin.⁴ Ah, heavenly Father, how would a sinful man dare to come to Thee if Thou hadst not given us Thy chosen Son, Eternal Wisdom, to be our guide? Ah, Eternal Wisdom, how dare a poor sinful man ever summon the courage to show his uncleanness in the presence of such purity, unless he took the Mother of all Mercies as his protection?

Eternal Wisdom, if Thou art my Brother, Thou art also my Lord; if Thou art Very Man, Thou art also Very God, and a stern judge of sin. Ah, then, when our poor souls are in the narrow prison of extreme distress of heart, and we can turn neither to one side nor to the other, nothing remains but to raise up our wretched eyes to Thee, beloved Queen of heaven! Ah, therefore, thou mirror reflecting the glory of the eternal sun, greetings to thee to-day, and may all contrite hearts salute thee! Ah, ye noble spirits, ye pure souls, come forth, glorify and praise, laud and honour the lovely paradise of all delight, the

¹ Romans xi, 33.

² The angels.

³ Jeremiah xxix, 11.

⁴ The Father led back to Himself all created things by means of Christ, who was born of Mary.

lofty Queen, for I am not worthy to do so, unless of her goodness she deigns to permit me.

O thou who art dearly beloved of God, thou golden throne of Eternal Wisdom, permit me, poor sinner that I am, to converse with thee for a short while concerning my infirmities! My soul falls down before thee, with timid eyes, with a shame-faced countenance, and with downcast eyes. Ah, Mother of all Mercies, I feel that neither my soul, nor any other sinful soul, needs any permission, or any intermediary, when approaching thee, for thou art the immediate mediator¹ of all sinners. The more sinful a soul, the greater the right it has to have access to thee; the more misdeeds it has committed, the better it is entitled to press forward towards thee. Therefore, my soul, go forward freely. If thy great sins drive thee away, ah, her infinite mercy invites thee to approach.

Ah, therefore, thou only consolation of all sinful hearts, thou sole refuge of guilty mankind, towards whom many wet eyes, many wounded, wretched hearts are raised up, be a merciful mediator and reconciler between me and Eternal Wisdom. Remember, remember, merciful beloved Queen, that thou hast derived all thy dignity through us sinful men. What has made thee, the Mother of God, the casket in which Eternal Wisdom has sweetly reposed? Lady, the sins of us poor men brought it about! How couldst thou be called the Mother of Mercies and of Compassion, save by reason of our afflictions, which have need of thy mercy and compassion? Our poverty has enriched thee, our frailties have ennobled thee above all pure creatures.

Ah, therefore, turn thy compassionate eyes, which thy merciful heart has never averted from a sinner, or from any disconsolate person, towards me, poor man; take me under thy protection, for my consolation and hope lie in thee. How many sinful souls there are, when they have forsaken God and all the heavenly host, denied God, despaired of God, and miserably parted from Him, who have clung to thee, alas, who have been so mercifully received by thee, until through thy mercy they have found mercy again!² What sinner is there, however many

¹ In the original: *daz mittellos mittel*.

² This loosely constructed sentence is literally translated.

crimes and felonies he may have committed, who would not take courage if he thinks of thee? Thou beloved one, sole consolation of us poor sinners, the infinite goodness of God has made thee so well-pleasing to all sinners that we must long for Him,¹ because of thy overflowing goodness. See, if my soul is truly absorbed in the thought of thee, my mind rejoices, and it would seem to be fitting, if it were possible, that my heart should leap out of my mouth, while my eyes wept, for thy name dissolves my soul like virgin honey.

Thou art indeed called the Mother, the Queen of Mercies; ah, tender Mother, ah, gentle Queen of infinite mercy! Ah, what a name! How unfathomable is the being whose name is so full of grace! Did ever a lute sound so well to a savage heart as this pure name does to our contrite hearts? At this lofty name it is fitting that every head should bow, and every knee should bend.² How often hast thou warded off the hostile hand of evil spirits from us! How often hast thou defended us from the angry justice of the stern Judge! How often hast thou obtained for us mercy and consolation! Ah, we poor sinful men, what are we to say; how are we ever to thank her for her great goodness? If all the tongues of angels, all pure spirits and souls, heaven and earth, and all that in them is, cannot fully praise her dignity, her joy, her grace, and her infinite glory, ah, what then should we sinful hearts do? Let us do what we can, and express to her our praise and thanks; for her great humility regards not the smallness of the gift; she regards the riches of the will.

Ah, sweet Queen, how fitting it is that womankind should glory in thee! We do not now say: 'Cursed be Eve for eating the fruit!' No, blessed be Eve,³ that she has brought us the sweet heavenly fruit! Let no one mourn again for paradise. We have lost one paradise, but we have gained two paradises! For is she not a paradise, in which there grew the fruit of the living tree, in which all high delight and joy were enclosed together? Or is not that also a paradise above all paradises,⁴ in

¹ The pronoun *sin* cannot refer to 'goodness', which is feminine in German, but can only refer to God.

² Philippians ii, 10-11.

³ Mary is called 'the second Eve' by the Fathers of the Church.

⁴ Christ.

which the dead, when they taste its fruit, are revived, from whose hands and feet and sides flow the living waters which refresh the whole earth, the springs of inexhaustible compassion, infinite wisdom, fervent love, and the fountain of eternal life? Indeed, Lord, he who has tasted this fruit, who has drunk of this spring, knows that the two paradises far surpass the earthly paradise.

Beloved Queen, thou art also the gate of mercy, the never-closed door of compassion. Heaven and earth may pass away¹ before thou lettest anyone who earnestly seeks thee leave thee without help. See, that is why thou art the first sight seen by my soul when I rise, and its last sight when I lay me down to sleep. What thy pure hands can communicate to Him and make acceptable to Him, how could it be rejected by Him, on account of the unworthiness of the messenger, if thou, the pure one, dost transmit it to thy dear Son? Therefore, gentle, beloved One, accept the smallness of my works, and offer them so that in thy hands they may appear to be something in the eyes of Almighty God.

Thou art indeed the pure vessel of red gold, enamelled with grace, inlaid with noble emeralds and sapphires and all manner of virtues, the sight of whom alone surpasses in the eyes of the heavenly King the sight of all pure creatures. Ah, chosen, beloved bride of God, if the heart of King Ahasuerus was captivated by the beauty of the fair Esther,² if she found favour in his eyes above all women, if she found grace above them all, so that he did what she asked; alas, thou art far superior to red roses and all lilies, how the heavenly King must be captivated by thy spotless purity, thy meek humility, by the sweet-smelling garden of all virtue and grace! Who captured the wild unicorn save thou?³ What unbounded favour thy lovely gentle beauty has found in His eyes above all mankind, in comparison with which all beauty is extinguished, as is a shining glow-worm by the rays of the brilliant sun! What overflowing grace thou hast

¹ St. Mark xiii, 31; St. Luke xxi, 33.

² Esther ii, 9.

³ According to an ancient belief, the unicorn could only be captured by a pure maiden. The unicorn symbolizes Christ, the maiden the Virgin Mary.

found before Him, for thyself and for us men who are without grace! How could or should the heavenly King refuse thee anything? Thou canst well say: 'My beloved is mine, and I am His!'¹ Ah, thou art God's, and He is thine, and ye two form an eternal, infinite play of love,² which no duality can ever separate! Remember and forget us not, poor beggars, who still wander so wretchedly in our sorrowful exile.

Ah, Lady of heaven and earth, rise up now, and be a mediator and provider of grace from thy gentle Son, from Eternal Wisdom. Ah, Eternal Wisdom, how canst Thou now refuse me anything? Just as I invoke Thee before the Eternal Father, I now invoke the pure, gentle, chosen Mother before Thy merciful eyes. Ah, merciful, fair Wisdom, look now upon her; look upon her gentle eyes, which have so often looked kindly at Thee; recognize the fair cheeks which she has so often pressed to Thy childlike face so lovingly! Ah, look upon the sweet mouth, that has kissed Thee so often and so tenderly; see the pure hands, which have so often served Thee! Ah, Thou gentle gentleness, how canst Thou refuse anything to her, who so lovingly nursed Thee, and held Thee in her arms, laid Thee down and lifted Thee up, and so tenderly brought Thee up?

Lord, I remind Thee of all the love that Thou didst ever receive from her in the days of Thy childhood, when, sitting on her maternal lap, Thou didst smile at her with Thy little smiling eyes, so affectionately and so tenderly, embracing her with Thy childish arms, with the infinite love and affection which Thou hadst for her above all creatures. Remember also the deep sincere sorrow that her maternal heart alone bore with Thee beneath the gallows of Thy sorrowful Cross, when she saw Thee in the anguish of death, when her heart and soul died many times with Thee in distress and grief, so that Thou mayst grant that I put off all obstacles, to obtain Thy grace, and never again to lose it.

¹ Canticles ii, 16.

² See above, p. 82.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Of her ineffable sorrow

Who will give mine eyes as many tears as the letters of the words I am writing, to write with bright tears of the sorrowful tears of the boundless grief of my dear Lady? Pure Lady and noble Queen of the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of earth, touch my stony heart with one of thy burning tears, which thou didst shed because of the bitter anguish of thy gentle Son beneath the dolorous Cross, in order that it¹ may be softened and that it may understand thee, for it is the nature of grief that no one knows it aright save those whom it affects. Ah, now touch my heart, beloved Lady, with thy sad speech, and tell me in short, telling words, that I may be comforted thereby, how thou didst feel, and how thou didst bear thyself, beneath the Cross, when thou didst see thy gentle Son, the fair Eternal Wisdom, perishing so lamentably!

Answer:² Thou shouldst hear this with lamentation and deep grief,³ for although I am now free from all grief, it was not so at that time. Before I came to the foot of the Cross, I had undergone many great and inexpressible sorrows, especially at the place where I had the first glimpse of the blows, and the jostling and ill-treatment of my Son, as a result of which I became faint, and was led after my dear Son, weak as I was, as far as the foot of the Cross. But, as for thy question, how I felt and how I bore myself, hear, as far as it is possible to know; for no heart that was ever born could ever fathom it completely.

See, all the sorrows that any heart ever underwent would

¹ Suso's heart.

² It is not Eternal Wisdom, but Mary, who replies.

³ Suso's chief source for what follows is the *Liber de Passione Christi*, erroneously ascribed to St. Bernard.

only be like a little drop compared with the sea, in comparison with the boundless grief that my maternal heart then suffered. And understand this: the more dear one's love is, the more lovely and sweet he is, the more painful is his loss and death. Alas, where was there any more gentle person born on earth, any more lovely one seen, than my own lovely Beloved, in whom and through whom I had possessed fully everything that this world could provide? I was then already dead to myself, and lived in Him, and when my fair Love was slain, then died I indeed. Just as my only Love was unique, and was dear above all dear ones, my unique sorrow was unsurpassed, and was a sorrow above all sorrows that were ever spoken of. His fair, lovable humanity was a delight to me to see; His sublime Divinity was a sweet pleasure to my eyes; to think of Him was the joy of my heart; to speak of Him was my pastime; to hear His words was the music of my soul. He was the mirror of my heart, the bliss of my soul; heaven and earth and all that is therein was mine in His presence.

See, when I saw my Love hanging before me, in the anguish of death, alas, what a sight; alas, what a moment it was! How my heart died within me; how my soul perished! How faint I became, and how all my senses faded away! I looked up, then I could not come to the help of my Son! I looked down, and then I saw with my own eyes those who were so cruelly ill-treating my Son. How the whole earth then seemed to close in on me! My heart was numbed with grief; my voice failed me; all my strength was gone. And yet, when I came to myself again, I raised up my hoarse voice, and spoke to my Son these words among others, in a lamentable tone: 'Alas, my Son, alas, my Child, alas, Thou glad mirror of my heart, in which I have often recognized myself with joy, how sorrowful I now see Thee before mine eyes! Alas, Thou treasure more dear than all this world, my mother, my father,¹ and all that my heart can offer, take me with Thee! Or to whom wilt Thou entrust Thy forlorn mother? Alas, my Son, who will grant that I may die for Thee, that I may suffer this bitter death for Thee? Alas,

¹ 'Tu mihi pater, tu mihi mater, tu mihi sponsus, tu mihi omnia eras.' *Liber de Passione Christi*, in Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, Tom. 182, Col. 1136.

wretched grief of a mother forsaken by love, how I am now robbed of all joy, pleasure and comfort! Alas, greedy death, why dost thou spare me? Take away, take away to my Son the poor mother, whose life is more bitter than any death. For I see Him die whom my soul loves. Alas, my Son, alas, my poor Son!¹

Behold, as I was thus wailing and lamenting, my Son comforted me most kindly, and said, among other things, that mankind could not and might not be redeemed in any other way, and He would rise again on the third day, and appear to me and the disciples, and He said: 'Lady, cease to weep, do not weep, My fair mother, I will never forsake thee in all eternity.' And as my Son comforted me so kindly, and commended me to the disciple whom He loved, and who also stood there full of deep sorrow—these words were so painfully and so penetratingly thrust into my heart that they pierced my heart and soul like a sharp sword—then even the hard hearts had great compassion on me. I raised up my hands and arms, and would gladly have embraced my Love in the sorrow of my heart, and yet it was not to be. And then, fully overcome by grief, I sank down under the Cross many times, and lost my powers of speech. When I came back to myself, and could do no other, I kissed the blood that flowed down from His wounds, so that my pallid cheeks and lips were quite reddened.²

THE SERVANT: Alas, boundless mercy, what infinite torture and pain is this pain! Whither shall I turn, or to whom shall I direct my gaze? If I look at Eternal Wisdom, alas, I see such pain as would break my heart; for they cry out at Him outwardly; deadly anguish tortures Him inwardly; all His veins are swollen; all His blood is running out. There is grief and pain and joyless death without any relief.

If I then turn my eyes to His pure mother, alas, I see her gentle heart pierced as if a thousand knives were thrust into it; I see her pure soul tortured through and through. No one has ever seen the like of her longing gestures; no one has ever heard the like of her maternal laments. Her feeble body has

¹ Cf. II Kings xviii, 33 (A.V. II Samuel xviii, 33).

² *Liber de Passione Christi*, Col. 1138.

collapsed from grief;¹ her fair face is streaked with the blood of her dying Son. Alas, what lamentation and grief above all other pain! His heart's anguish depends on the sad mother's grief; the martyrdom of her, the sad mother, is due to the innocent death of her dear Son, which is much more painful to her than her own death. He looks at her and comforts her kindly; she raises up her hands to Him pitifully, and she would gladly have died a wretched death for Him. Ah, which of them was in worse case? Which is the greater suffering? It is on both hands so boundless that there never was its like.

Alas, for the maternal heart, for the gentle womanly soul! How could thy maternal heart ever have borne this immense grief at all? Blessed be the gentle heart, compared with whose grief all that has ever been said or written about grief is like a dream as compared with reality! Blessed be thou, rising like the dawn above all creatures, and blessed be the flowery rosy field of thy fair face, adorned with the ruby red blood of Eternal Wisdom!

Alas, thou lovable face of the fair Wisdom, how Thou art dying! Alas, fair body, how Thou art hanging! Alas, and alas, pure blood, how Thou dost flow down so hot on the mother who bore Thee! Alas, for all mothers, let the sad story of her grief be told to you! All ye pure hearts, let the pure rosy blood which thus flows on the pure mother move your hearts! Look, all hearts that ever knew grief, and see that there was never grief like this.² It is not strange that our hearts melt away with woe and pity here; so great was the distress that it split the hard stones; the earth trembled and the sun was extinguished, that they might suffer with their Maker.

¹ This detail is not to be found in the Biblical account, but is an addition of the *Liber de Passione Christi*.

² Cf. Lamentations i, 12.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

How it stood with his inward man at this time

THE SERVANT: Eternal Wisdom, the closer one draws to Thy boundless sufferings, the more unfathomable they become. Great as was Thy anguish under the Cross, it was even greater on the Cross, as regards Thy bodily strength, which was then feeling the bitter pangs of death. Ah, gentle Lord, how was it with Thy inward man, Thy noble soul? Didst Thou receive no comfort or sweetness at that time, like other martyrs, so that Thy awful sufferings were indeed alleviated thereby; or when did it draw to an end?

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: Hear of a grief greater than any of which thou hast yet heard! Although My soul, with its highest powers, was contemplating and enjoying the naked Godhead, as gloriously as it does now, the lower powers of the inward and outward man were so fully abandoned to themselves, down to the lowest point of unrelieved suffering, that such torture has never been equalled.¹ Listen: as I hung there, so completely helpless and forsaken, with bleeding wounds, weeping eyes, outstretched arms, and twisted veins in all My limbs, in the anguish of death, I spoke in a lamentable voice, and called despairingly to My Father, saying: 'My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?'² And yet My will was united with His, by His eternal ordinance. Lo! and when My blood and all My strength had completely poured out and ebbed away, I felt bitter thirst in the pangs of death, but I thirsted much more for the salvation of all mankind. Then, in My terrible thirst, gall and vinegar were offered to My thirsty lips. And when I had redeemed all mankind, I said: 'It is finished.'³ I yielded complete

¹ St. Thomas, *Summa Theologica*, III, Qu. 46, Art. 6, 8.

² St. Matthew xxvii, 46.

³ St. John xix, 30.

obedience to My Father until death,¹ I commended My spirit into His hands, and said: 'Into Thy hands, etc.'² and then My noble soul parted from My divine body, and yet both remained united with the Godhead. Thereupon a sharp spear was thrust through My right side. A stream of precious blood welled out, and with it a spring of living water.³

See, My child, with such distressing anguish did I redeem thee and the elect, saving them from eternal death by the living sacrifice of My innocent blood.

THE SERVANT: Ah, gentle, beloved Lord and Brother, how sorrowfully and with what grievous pains hast Thou redeemed me! How affectionately hast Thou loved me, and how graciously hast Thou saved me! Ah, fair Wisdom, how shall I thank Thee for Thy love and Thy great suffering? Lord, if I had the strength of Samson, and the beauty of Absalom, the wisdom of Solomon, and the wealth and dignity of all kings, I would exhaust them all in praise in Thy service. Lord, now I am naught, I can do naught, I know naught. O Lord, how can I requite it?

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: If thou hadst the tongues of all angels, and the good works of all men, and the power of all creatures, thou couldst not requite the smallest of the pangs that I underwent from love of thee.

THE SERVANT: Gentle Lord, grant me and teach me to become loving by Thy grace, since no one can repay the tokens of Thy love.⁴

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: Thou shouldst place before thine eyes My sorrowful Cross, and take to heart My bitter martyrdom, and conform all thy sufferings thereto. If I leave thee in disconsolate sorrow, or allow thee to harden and dry up without sweetness,⁵ as My heavenly Father allowed Me to do, thou shouldst not seek for comfort from without. Thy lamentable cries should rise up to thy heavenly Father with glad self-renunciation, according to His fatherly will. Lo! however bitter thy outward afflictions are, and the more forsaken thou art

¹ Philippians ii, 8.

² St. Luke xxiii, 46.

³ St. John xix, 34.

⁴ The wounds of Christ.

⁵ In spiritual aridity.

inwardly, the more shalt thou be like unto Me, and the more beloved by thy heavenly Father, for in this respect the most pious persons are the most sorely tempted.

Whenever thy soul has a strong craving to seek satisfaction and joy in anything that might be pleasant to thee, thou shouldst abandon it for love of Me; and then with Me the thirst of thy lips will be quenched by bitterness. Thou shouldst thirst for the salvation of all men, devote thy good works to a perfect life, and accomplish them to the end. Thou shouldst have a submissive will in swift obedience to thy superiors, a soul surrendered to the hands of thy heavenly Father and freed from all self-will, and a spirit that passes from time to eternity, in imitation of thy last journey.¹ Lo! then thy cross will be conformed to My sorrowful Cross and nobly perfected in it.

Thou shouldst shut thyself lovingly in My pierced side, by My love-pierced heart, and seek to dwell and remain there; then will I cleanse thee with living water, and adorn thee with the roses of My rosy-coloured blood. I will be united to thee, and make thee eternally one with Me.

THE SERVANT: Lord, no magnet was ever so powerful to draw to itself the hard iron, as Thy exemplary and loving Passion to draw all hearts to be made one with it. Ah, loving Lord, draw me now through joy and sorrow from all this world to Thee and Thy Cross; make perfect in me the closest imitation of Thy Cross, that my soul may enjoy Thee in Thy highest glory!

¹ To be as free from the world as one who is leaving it in death.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Of the descent from the Cross

THE SERVANT: Ah, pure Mother and tender Lady, when did thy great and bitter grief come to an end, which thou didst endure for thy beloved Son?

Answer: Listen with sad compassion. When my gentle Son breathed His last, and was hanging dead before me, my heart and soul were completely bereft of all strength. I could do naught else but look up wretchedly at my dead Son, again and again. When they came and wanted to release Him, I felt as if I had risen from the dead. Ah, with what motherly love I received His dead arms, with what faithfulness I pressed them to my blood-stained cheeks! When He was handed down to me, how very lovingly I embraced Him, dead as He was with my arms, pressing to my maternal heart my one fair, tender Beloved! Again and again I kissed His fresh flowing wounds, His dead face, which, however, like His whole body, was transformed into an exquisite loveliness: no heart could have borne to contemplate it. I took my tender Son on my lap, and looked at Him. He was dead, but I gazed at Him ever and anon, although He had neither feeling nor voice!

Lo, then my heart seemed to die once more, and with the mortal wounds it had received it was ready to break into a thousand pieces. Then it uttered many a deep groan. My eyes shed many wretched, bitter tears. My whole appearance became most sad. As my lamentable words came forth from my lips, they were broken by grief and half-unspoken. Alas, I said, was ever a man on earth so ill-treated as my innocent, beloved Son? Alas, my Son, my comfort and my only joy, why hast Thou forsaken me? Why art Thou thus transformed so completely into an object of grief for me? Where is now the joy I had in

Thy birth, the pleasure I had in Thy lovable childhood? Where the honour and dignity I had from Thy presence? All that could ever gladden my heart, whither has it vanished? Alas, anguish, grief, and sorrow! All is now completely transformed into unbounded grief and deadly pain! Alas, my Son, alas, my Son, how I am now deserted by love! How utterly disconsolate my heart has become! These and many other such doleful words I spoke over my dead Son.

THE SERVANT: Ah, pure and fair Mother, grant, permit me, once more to refresh my heart with the sight of thy Beloved and my Lord, the lovable Wisdom, before the parting comes, and He is snatched away from us to the grave.

Pure Mother, immense as was thy grief, and fit to move all hearts to their depths, methinks thou didst nevertheless find some pleasure in the loving embrace of thy dead Son. Ah, pure, tender Lady, I ask thee to offer me thy tender Child, as He appeared in death, to sit on the lap of my soul, that I may share according to my power, spiritually and by meditation, in that which was thine at that time physically.

Lord, I turn my eyes to Thee in the most fervent joy and heartfelt love, with which an only love was ever regarded by her lover. Lord, my heart opens up to receive Thee as the tender rose opens to the bright rays of the sun. Lord, my soul unfolds wide towards Thee the arms of its boundless yearning. Ah, beloved Lord, I embrace Thee to-day with fervent desire, in gratitude and praise, pressing Thee into the very depths of my heart and soul, reminding Thee of this loving hour,¹ so that Thou wilt never allow it to be forgotten by me. For I ask that neither life nor death, joy nor sorrow, may ever separate Thee from me. Lord, my eyes gaze fixedly at Thy dead countenance; my soul repeatedly kisses all Thy fresh bleeding wounds; all my senses are nourished by this sweet fruit under this living tree of the Cross, and rightly so.² Lord, there are some persons who draw comfort from their innocent lives, others from their severe discipline and strict life, some from this and others from

¹ Of His death.

² Bihlmeyer puts a full stop after *keruzes* ('cross'), and connects *billich* ('rightly') with what follows.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

that, but all my consolation and confidence rest entirely on Thy Passion, on Thy Atonement, and Thy merits. And so should I at all times carry it joyfully in the depths of my heart, and show this image¹ forth outwardly, by word and deed, to the best of my power.

O lovely radiance of eternal light! How entirely art Thou now extinguished for my sake! Extinguish Thou in me the burning desire of all sin. O clear, pure mirror of the Divine majesty, how defiled Thou art now! Cleanse the great blemishes of my misdeeds! O Thou fair image of the fatherly Goodness, how soiled Thou art and utterly disfigured! Recreate the disfigured, faded image of my soul! O Thou innocent Lamb, how woefully Thou art ill-treated! Atone for and redeem my guilty, sinful life! O thou King of Kings and Lord of Lords, my soul sees Thee lying here so wretched and dead! Grant to me, just as my soul now embraces Thee with lamentation and woe in Thy despised state, that it may be embraced by Thee with joy in Thy eternal light.

¹ Of the Passion.

CHAPTER TWENTY

Of the lamentable separation from the grave

THE SERVANT: Now, gentle Lady, make an end of thy great grief and of thy lament,¹ and tell me how the separation from thy beloved One took place.

Answer: It was piteous to hear and to see! Ah, it was quite endurable as long as I had my Son with me, yet when they tore my dead Son from my dead heart, out of my embracing arms, and from my face pressed against Him, and buried Him, one could hardly believe how sorrowful I then felt. When the parting came, what grief and distress I was then seen to feel! For when they parted me from my buried Beloved, the separation tore my heart like bitter death. Supported by the hands of those who led me away, I took my wretched steps, for I was bereft of all comfort. My heart was yearning and sorrowing for my Dear One. I had the confident assurance that among all men I alone showed Him complete fidelity and true affection up to the grave.

THE SERVANT: Loving, tender lady, all hearts greet thee, and all tongues praise thee, for all the goodness that the Father's heart willed to give us has flowed through thy hands. Thou art the beginning and the mean, thou shouldst also be the end. Ah, gentle, pure Mother, be mindful to-day of the lamentable separation, remember the sorrowful parting, that severed thee from thy gentle Son, and grant that I may never be parted from thee, nor from His gladsome sight. Ah, pure Mother, and as my soul now stands beside thee with compassionate pity, and receives thee with fervent desire, and in contemplation with heartfelt zeal, with gratitude and praise, leads thee from the

¹ Spoken at the foot of the Cross.

CHAPTER TWENTY

grave through the gate of Jerusalem back again to the house, thus I pray that at its last journey, my soul may be assisted by thee, pure gentle Mother, and thou fullness of comfort to me, back to its heavenly home, and confirmed in eternal blessedness.

Second Part

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

How one should learn to die and what is the nature of an unprepared death

Eternal Wisdom, if the whole earth were given to me as my possession, that would not be as dear to me as the truth and profit that I have found in Thy sweet teaching. For this reason, I pray from the depths of my heart that Thou, Eternal Wisdom, wilt teach me more.

Lord, what is most fitting for a servant of Eternal Wisdom, who wishes to belong to Thee alone? Lord, I would fain hear of the union of pure intelligence with the Holy Trinity, when reason is taken out of itself, and released from all hindrances, in the true radiance of the inner birth of the Word,¹ and the re-birth of its own spirit.

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: He who in his life stands among the lowest should not ask about the highest doctrines. I will teach thee what is useful to thee.

THE SERVANT: Lord, what wilt Thou teach me?

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM:

1. I will teach thee how to die;
2. and will teach thee how to live;
3. I will teach thee to receive Me lovingly;²
4. and will teach thee to praise Me fervently.³

See, this is what is most fitting for thee.

THE SERVANT: Eternal Wisdom, if I had my heart's desire, I know of nothing that I could wish to learn, except to be able

¹ The birth of Christ in the soul: one of Eckhart's favourite themes.

² In the Sacrament.

³ These are the contents of the next four chapters.

CHAPTER ONE

to die to myself and to all things, and to live to Thee alone, to love Thee with all my heart, to receive Thee lovingly, and to praise Thee worthily. Ah, God, how blessed is the man who knows this well, and who spends all his life in praising Thee! Lord, dost Thou mean a spiritual death, which Thy dolorous death has so lovingly demonstrated, or a bodily death?

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: I mean both of them.

THE SERVANT: Lord, why should I need to be taught about bodily death? It teaches itself well enough when it comes.

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: If anyone postpones the teaching until then, he will be lost.

THE SERVANT: Alas, Lord, it is still somewhat painful to me to hear about death.

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: See, that is why sudden, unprepared deaths increase in number: the towns and monasteries are full of them at present.¹ See, it² has often mysteriously curbed thee, and wanted to take thee away from here, as it does to countless multitudes, among whom I will now show thee one. Now open up thy inner senses; see and hear; see the form of terrible death in thy neighbour, take heed of the lamentable voice thou shalt hear.

The Servant listened in his imagination to the cries of the doleful figure of the unprepared dying man, who spoke with very lamentable words, as follows: The fear of death compassed me about.³ Alas, God of heaven, that I was ever born into this world! My life began with wailing and weeping, now my departure is made with bitter crying and weeping. Ah, the groans of death have compassed me about; the pains of hell have enveloped me. Alas, death, alas, terrible death, what a hateful guest art thou to my young cheerful heart! How little have I expected thee! Now thou hast fallen upon me from behind, so that I am like a condemned man in chains who is being led to the place of execution. Now I clap my hands together above my head;⁴ I wring them with grief, for I would gladly

¹ Probably a reference to the plague of 1328-9.

² The fear of death.

³ Psalm xvii, 5-6 (A.V. xviii, 5-6).

⁴ A sign of grief.

escape him.¹ I look about me into all the ends of the earth, to see if anyone would give me counsel or help, but it cannot be. I hear death speaking within me in a deadly tone thus: 'Neither friend, nor wealth, nor knowledge, nor intelligence can avail against it; it must needs be so.' Alas, and must it be so? Ah, God, must I really go hence? Must there be a parting now? Why was I ever born? Ah, death, alas, death, what wilt thou do to me?

The SERVANT said: My friend, why dost thou behave so ill? This is a judgment common to rich and poor, young and old alike; there are far more of them who have died before their time than at their time. Or dost thou alone hope to escape death? That is great foolishness!

Reply of the UNPREPARED DYING MAN: Alas, God, what a bitter comfort is this! I am not foolish; the foolish are they who have not lived for Him, and who are not afraid of death. They are blind; they die like cattle; they know not what they have to face. I do not complain that I must die; alas, I complain that I must die unprepared. I am dying, and I am not prepared to die! I weep not merely for the end of my life; I cry and weep for the lovely days that are so completely past and gone without profit. I am indeed like a child born before its time, and cast out; I am like a blossom torn off in May. My days have flown away faster than an arrow from the bow.² I am forgotten, as though I had never been, like the path of a bird through the air, which closes after it again, and is unknown to all men.³ Therefore are my words full of bitterness, and my speech is full of pain.⁴

Alas, who will grant to me, poor man, to be as I was before, to have my happiness before me,⁵ and to know what I now know! Alas, when I was in the world, I did not value it rightly, I let it pass away in vanity and folly. Now that it has been dragged away from me, I cannot bring it back again; I cannot overtake it. Not a single hour was so short that I would not have valued it more highly and more gratefully than a poor man

¹ Death. The pronoun 'him' has no grammatical antecedent.

² Wisdom v, 12.

³ Wisdom v, 11.

⁴ Job xxiii, 2; vi, 3.

⁵ In the future, not in the past.

if one gave him a kingdom as his own. See, for this reason, my eyes shed bright tears: because they cannot bring it back again. Alas, God in heaven, that I should have wasted so many a day in idleness; and that it avails me so little now!

Ah, ye blossoming roses, who still have your day before you, look at me, and learn wisdom. Turn your youth to God, and spend your time with Him alone, lest this should befall you also. Alas, youth, how I have wasted thee! Lord of heaven, let me lament it before Thee for ever. I would not believe anyone; my wild soul would listen to none. Ah, God, I have now fallen into the valley of bitter death. The time has flown, youth is spent; it would have been better for me if my mother's womb had been my grave,¹ rather than that I should have spent the beautiful time so uselessly.

THE SERVANT: Turn to God; repent thy sins. If the end is good, all is good.²

Reply of the UNPREPARED DYING MAN: Alas, what words are these? Am I to repent? Am I to be converted? Dost thou not see how afraid I am, how very great is my distress? I am like a wounded bird which is seized by the talons of a hawk, and is paralysed with the fear of death. Indeed I know nothing save that I would gladly escape, yet cannot escape. I am oppressed by death and the bitter parting. Alas, repentance and voluntary conversion of a man still free to act, what a safe way thou art! He who misses his chance may well be lost!

Alas, for the long postponement of my amendment, how much too long it was! Good will without works, good promises without fulfilment, have ruined me! I have put off God until I fell into the night of death. Alas, almighty God, is not that the sorrow that is above all sorrows? Should it not give me pain to think that I have lost my whole life, all my thirty years in this way? For I know not if I have ever spent a whole day according to God's will, as I should have done, or if I have ever rendered God any acceptable service. Alas, it cuts me to the heart! Ah, God, how dishonoured I shall stand before Thee and all the heavenly host!

¹ Cf. Job x, 18.

² A proverb in Swabian, as in English.

Now that I am going hence, at this hour, one single *Ave Maria* said with devotion would delight me more, alas, than if one were to give me a thousand marks in gold. Ah, God, what have I thus lost! How I have injured myself! To think that I never considered it while I might have done! How many hours have fled from me; how I have let little things lead me astray from such great bliss! It would now be preferable for me, it would bring me more reward in eternity, if out of love I had renounced the pleasure of seeing my friend, when it was contrary to the will of God, than if he had prayed to God for thirty years on his knees for my benefit. Listen, listen, all men to this lamentable matter: I go round and round because time is lacking; and I have begged for small alms from the merited rewards of good people for my own satisfaction. Yet I am refused, because they fear that the oil in their own lamps will go short.¹ Ah, God of heaven, have mercy, since I might have earned such great rewards and riches so many days when I had my healthy body, while I was idle, whereas now the small alms, only as a satisfaction, not as a reward, would be so acceptable, but no one gives me aught. Ah, let it touch your hearts, young and old, and before it is too late, collect it in this precious time, lest you be beggars and like me rejected at this hour.

THE SERVANT: Ah, dear friend, thy distress goes to my heart. I conjure thee, by the living God,² give me some counsel, lest I too fall into distress.

Reply of the UNPREPARED DYING MAN: The best advice, the greatest wisdom and foresight on earth, is to prepare thyself by a complete confession, and to give up all the things by which thou knowest thyself to be held captive, and to behave at all times as if thou must go hence this very day, or this week at the latest. Imagine now in thy heart that thy soul is in purgatory, and has to stay there for ten years for thy misdeeds, and that only this year is granted to thee to help it. Consider it often, and see how wretchedly it is calling out to thee, and saying: 'Alas, my dearest friend, stretch out thy hand to me, have pity on me, help me to come quickly out of this terrible fire, for I

¹ St. Matthew xxv, 8-9.

² St. Matthew xxvi, 63.

am so wretched that no one will help me loyally save thee alone. I am forgotten by the whole world, for every one is engaged in his own affairs.'

THE SERVANT: This would be an excellent doctrine for those who, like thee, could keep it in their hearts, as an ever-present conviction. But, however penetrating thy words, they¹ sit here, and heed them little; they have ears and hear not; they have eyes and see not.² No one wants to die before his soul leaves his body.

Reply of the UNPREPARED DYING MAN: Hence, even if they hang on the hook of bitter death, and cry out with pain, they will not be heard. See, how among a hundred persons who wear the religious habit—I will say nothing of others—not one heeds my words to the conversion and improvement of his life. So it has now come to the point that among a hundred there is not one who will not fall unprepared into the snare of death, as I have done.

Happy are those, moreover, who do not die unexpectedly and unprepared. Vain honours, bodily comfort, transient love, and covetous search for their needs, all this blinds the multitude. But if thou wilt escape a lamentable unprepared death, with the small number,³ take my advice. See, the steadfast contemplation of death, the loyal help of thy poor soul, which cries to thee so miserably, will soon bring it about that thou canst not merely live without fear, but canst await it⁴ with the whole desire of thy heart.

Remember me often and whole-heartedly every day; write my words in thy heart. Look at my bitter distress, which will soon be thy lot. Look, what a night this is! Happy the man that ever he was born, who comes to this hour well prepared. He travels well, however bitter his death is, for the bright angels guard him, the saints escort him, the heavenly host welcomes him; his last journey is the entrance into his heavenly country. Alas, God, where is my soul to find shelter this night in the foreign and unknown land? How completely is my soul abandoned; ah, God, how very wretched it will be among all wretched souls! Who is there who will help it in true fidelity?

¹ The ungodly.

³ Of the saved.

² Psalm cxiii, 6 (A.V. cxv, 6).

⁴ Death.

Now I will put an end to my lamentable complaint. The hour has come; alas, now I see that it cannot be otherwise. My hands begin to die, my face to grow pale, my eyes grow dim. Ah, the cruel blows of death strike my poor heart! I begin to struggle for breath; the light of this world fades away from me; I begin to see the other world. Alas, God, what a sight! The horrible forms of black Moors¹ are gathering together; the hellish beasts have surrounded me; they are watching to see if my poor soul will fall into their possession. Alas, righteous Judge, what a severe judgment! How heavily Thou dost weigh the very lightest thing, that no one heeds at all, so small it is! The cold sweat spreads over my body from fear. Alas, for the angry glance of the severe Judge! How very hard are Thy judgments!

Now I turn in my mind to the other world, towards which I am being swiftly led, to purgatory; and there, in the land of torture, I see fear and distress. Alas, God, I see the wild hot flames striking high up over their heads; they are going up and down in the dark flames like the sparks in a fire. They cry: 'Woe, and woe again! How great is our pain!'²

All hearts together could not consider the variety and bitterness of our distress. One hears many wretched cries: 'Help! ho! help! Alas, where is all the help of our friends, where are all the fair promises of our false friends? How they have forsaken us, how completely they have forgotten us! Alas, have pity, have pity upon us, at least you, my dearest friends.'³ How we have served you, how much we have loved you, and how we have been rewarded! Alas, why do you let us now burn in the hot furnace? Alas, that we did not avert this from ourselves, when we might have done so with such a small effort! The smallest torture here is indeed more than that of any martyr on earth. Alas, now we are seething, now we are roasting, now we cry out for help! But above all things it pains us that for so long we must be deprived of the joyful sight:⁴ this destroys our heart, mind and soul. And with these words I pass away.

¹ In the Middle Ages demons were often represented by black figures, and the Moors were infidels.

² A rhymed and rhythmical passage.

³ Job xix, 21.

⁴ Of the face of God.

THE SERVANT: Ah, Eternal Wisdom, hast Thou forsaken me? Alas, God, how real death has become to me! Ah, my soul, art thou still in my body? Lord of heaven, am I still alive? Ah, Lord, I praise Thee, and vow to Thee amendment until death! How deeply afraid I am! Indeed, I never knew that death was so near to me! In truth, Lord, this vision ought to be for ever profitable to me. Lord, I will walk every day through the ambush of death, and will look round me, lest he should take me unawares. I will learn to die; I will turn towards the world beyond. Lord, I see that I have no continuing here.¹

Lord, truly, I ought not to put off contrition and amendment till death. Ah, I am indeed so terrified by this vision that I wonder if my soul is still in my body! Take away, away from me all lying at ease, all long sleeping, good eating and drinking, transient honour, luxury and pleasure! A little suffering causes me such pain here; how then could I ever endure immeasurable suffering? Woe is me, God, if I were to be dead thus, to die now, what would become of me then? How much have I still to answer for? Lord, I will this day regard my wretched soul as a beggar, and since all her friends have forsaken her, I will be kind to her.

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: See, thou shouldst diligently heed this as long as thou art young, as long as thou art strong and healthy, and as long as thou canst make amends. But when indeed thou comest to the hour, and canst not make amends, thou shouldst not heed anything, but only My death and My boundless mercy, in order that thy confidence may remain unimpaired.

THE SERVANT: Alas, Lord, I fall at Thy feet with bitter tears, and beg Thee to punish me here, as Thou wilt, only defer it not. Alas, Lord, for purgatory, for the immense torture! Why have I been so senseless hitherto, to make so light of it? How deeply I fear it now!

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: Be of good cheer! This fear is the beginning of wisdom,² and the way to all blessedness! Or hast thou forgotten that all the Scriptures announce what great

¹ Hebrews xiii, 14.

² Wisdom i, 16; Proverbs i, 7; ix, 10.

wisdom there is in fear and the diligent contemplation of death? Thou shouldst ever praise God, for among a thousand men it has not been given to one to know it as thou dost. Listen to sad tidings: they hear it spoken of, they know it beforehand and let it pass; they let it go by, and do not heed it, alas, until they are swallowed up; and then they cry out, then they howl and weep, but it is too late. Open thine eyes, count on thy fingers, see how many of them have died in thy time near thee. Hold converse with them in thy heart; put thy old man, as if he were dead,¹ beside them; ask them all together. Look, with what deep groans and bitter tears they speak: 'Ah, blessed is he, that ever he was born, who follows the sweet counsel, and is made wise by the loss of others!' Make thyself ready to depart, for indeed thou sittest like a bird on a bough, and like a man standing at the water's edge, watching a ship swiftly sailing along, on which he is to sit, and to travel to a foreign land, from which he will never return. Therefore, shape thy life accordingly, so that when he² comes, thou wilt be ready and canst sail away hence joyfully.

¹ Imagine him to be dead.

² Death.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

*How one should live inwardly*¹

THE SERVANT: Lord, there are many kinds of exercises,² various kinds of lives; one is like this and another different; there are many and various ways. Lord, the Scriptures are inexhaustible, there are doctrines without number. Eternal Wisdom, teach me in a few words about the depths³ of all those doctrines, according to which I should above all conduct myself in the path of a true life.

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: The truest, the most useful, the swiftest⁴ doctrine that thou canst find in all the Scriptures, by which thou art shown in a few words all truth concerning the perfection of a pure life, is this doctrine:

1. Keep thyself detached from all men.
2. Keep thyself pure from all images introduced from outside.
3. Free thyself from everything that might bring hindrance, attachment and care;
4. and devote thy mind at all times to a secret Divine contemplation, in which thou bearest Me always before thine eyes, as a steadfast object, from which thine eyes are never diverted. And as regards other kinds of discipline, whether it be poverty, fasting, vigils, or any other mortifications, direct them to this end, and use them as far as may be useful to thee in this respect. See, thus thou wilt achieve the highest goal of perfection, which not one man among a thousand understands,

¹ The general thought of this chapter is taken from John Cassian's *First Conference* (with Abbot Moses).

² Discipline.

³ The essence.

⁴ The most effective.

for they fix their aim only on other kinds of discipline, and consequently they go astray for many long years.¹

THE SERVANT: Lord, who can persist for ever in the unwavering sight of Thy Divine presence?

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: No one who lives to-day in time. Thou art only told of it in order that thou mayst know whither thou art bound for, what thy goal ought to be, and in what direction thy heart and mind should aim. And when the vision is withdrawn from thee, it will seem to thee as if thine eternal salvation was taken away from thee. Then thou shouldst at once return to it,² so that it may again be granted to thee, and thou shouldst give heed to thyself. For whenever it escapes thee, thou farest like a boatman, whose oars have slipped out of his hand in the rough waves, and who knows not whither he is going. But if thou canst not yet remain steadfast in this matter, the number of thy returns and determined escapes will bring thee back to it³ for good, as far as is possible.³

Listen, listen, my son, to the faithful instruction of thy faithful Father,⁴ take careful heed of it; lock it up in the depths of thy heart. Remember who it is that teaches thee this, how fully and thoroughly He means it. If thou wouldst never again be arid,⁵ place it before thine eyes. Wherever thou sittest, standest, or walkest, may it be as if I were present to warn thee, and say: 'My son, bear thyself sincerely, purely, freely and aspiringly!' See, then thou wilt immediately be made mindful of My words, and the good will be made known to thee which is as yet hidden from thee.

THE SERVANT: Ah, Eternal Wisdom, praised be Thou eternally! My Lord, and my most faithful Friend, even if I would not do so of mine own accord, Thou compellest me to do so by Thy sweet words and with Thy loving doctrine. Lord, I shall and will devote myself with all diligence thereto.

¹ Apart from minor changes, this is a quotation from the tractate 'On Detachment', ascribed to Eckhart (Franz Pfeiffer, *Deutsche Mystiker*, 2 Band, pp. 492, 34 to 493, 1, Leipzig, 1857).

² The goal.

³ This corresponds, not to Cassian, but to Pfeiffer, loc. cit., 493, 1-10.

⁴ Proverbs i, 8.

⁵ Spiritually dried up, forsaken by God.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

How one should receive God lovingly

Eternal Wisdom, if my soul could now enter the secret shrine of Thy Divine mystery, I would fain ask more about love; and my question is this: Lord, Thou hast poured out so fully the abyss of Thine unfathomable love in Thy loving Passion, that I wonder if Thou canst show any more tokens of love.

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: Yes, as the stars in the heavens are innumerable, even so the tokens of My unfathomable love are not to be numbered.

THE SERVANT: Ah, my sweet Love, ah, gentle, loving, chosen Lord, look how my soul longs for Thy love! Turn Thy lovely face towards me, lost creature that I am; look how all things in me fade away and wane, apart from the one treasure of Thy fervent love, and tell me something more of the noble hidden treasure. Lord, Thou knowest that it is the privilege of love never to be satisfied with anything from its beloved. The more it has, the more it desires, however unworthy it recognizes itself to be; for this is the effect of the superabundance of love. Ah, fair Wisdom, now tell me what is the greatest and most lovely token of love that Thou didst ever reveal in Thy adopted humanity, apart from the unfathomable token of love shown in Thy bitter death?

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: Now answer Me a question: what is it that is most lovely among all lovely things that come to a loving heart from its beloved?

THE SERVANT: Lord, as I understand it, there is nothing more lovely for a loving heart than its beloved and his beloved presence.

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: Even so. And lest My loved ones should lack anything that pertains to true love, when I was

about to depart from this world by a bitter death, and go to My Father, knowing beforehand the longing that many loving hearts would have for Me, My boundless love then constrained Me to give Myself and My loving presence at the table of the Last Supper to My dear disciples, and every day I do so still to My elect.

THE SERVANT: Ah, beloved Lord, but art Thou Thyself really present there?

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: Thou hast Me in the sacrament, both before thee and within thee,¹ as really and truly God and man, in soul and body, with flesh and blood, as truly as My pure Mother bore Me on her arm, and as truly as I am in heaven in My perfect brightness.

THE SERVANT: Ah, gentle Lord, there is still one thing in my heart; dare I ask Thy permission to say it to Thee? Lord, it comes not from unbelief. I believe that Thou canst perform whatsoever Thou wilt. But, my gentle Lord, I wonder, dare I ask how the fair, lovely glorified body of my beloved Lord in all His greatness and fullness could be concealed so mysteriously in the small form of the little piece of bread, which is so incommensurable with Thy greatness? Gentle Lord, be not angry! As Thou art my chosen loving Wisdom, I would gladly of Thy grace hear something about this from Thy sweet mouth.

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: No tongue can express how it is that My fair body and soul are present in actual fact in the Sacrament, for no mind can understand it: it is a work of My omnipotence. Hence thou shouldst simply believe it, and not ponder about it overmuch. And yet I must tell thee a little concerning it. I will drive out this miracle by another miracle. Tell me: how can it be in the natural world that a large house is reflected in a small mirror, and in every part of it, if it is divided up?² Or how can it be that the great heavens are so minutely compressed into a small eye, although they are so unequal in size?

THE SERVANT: Lord, truly, I cannot explain it; it is a wonderful thing, for the eye is like a mere point as compared with the heavens.

¹ On the altar and also after receiving the consecrated host.

² If the mirror is broken into pieces.

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: See, although neither this,¹ nor aught else in nature, is truly like it,¹ yet, if nature can do this, why cannot I, the Lord of nature, perform much greater things supernaturally? Now tell me: is it not as great a miracle to create heaven and earth and all creatures out of nothing, as to transform the bread into Myself invisibly?

THE SERVANT: Lord, as I understand it, it is just as possible for Thee to transform something into something else, as to create something out of nothing.

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: Dost thou then wonder at one thing,² and not at another?³ Then tell Me: thou believest that I fed five thousand persons with five loaves. Where was the hidden matter which then obeyed My commands?

THE SERVANT: Lord, I do not know.

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: Or dost thou believe that thou hast a soul?

THE SERVANT: I do not believe it: I know it, because otherwise I should not be alive.

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: Yet thou canst not see thy soul with bodily eyes: believest thou then that there are no other beings than those that one can see and hear?

THE SERVANT: Lord, I know that there are many more of those beings that are invisible to bodily eyes, than of those one can see.

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: Now, look, there are many persons of such coarse understanding that they can scarcely believe that there is anything but what they can grasp with their senses, but scholars know quite well that it is not so.⁴ It is the same thing with human understanding, as compared with Divine knowledge. If I had asked thee 'What are the entrances of the abyss like?' or 'How are the waters placed above the heavens?' thou wouldst perhaps answer: 'It is too profound for me; I do not ponder these things. I have never been into the abyss, nor up to the heavens.' Now I have asked thee about earthly things,

¹ The sky and the eye.

² The transubstantiation of the elements.

³ The creation of the universe out of nothing.

⁴ That they are wrong.

which thou seest and hearest, and thou dost not understand them. How then canst thou grasp that which transcends heaven and earth and all our intelligence?¹ Or, why wilt thou ask questions about it? See, such wondering and such sudden thoughts only come from coarseness of understanding, which regards divine and supernatural things in the likeness of earthly and natural things, and this is not correct. If a woman gave birth to a child in a tower, and it was brought up there, and its mother told it about the sun and the stars, the child would be quite amazed, and would think it absurd and unbelievable, although it was well known to the mother.

THE SERVANT: Lord, truly, I cannot say any more, for Thou hast enlightened my faith, so that I need² not have any amazement in my heart in future. How can I pursue the highest things when I cannot grasp the lowest? Thou art the truth; Thou canst not lie; Thou art the highest wisdom, which knows all things; Thou art the Almighty, Who can do all things.

Ah, fair, beloved Lord, now I have often wished with all my heart that I might receive Thee in my arms bodily, like the righteous Simeon in the Temple, alas, beloved Lord, and press Thee with my arms into my very heart and soul, so that I might receive Thee as truly as he did, and so much more nobly, since Thy gentle body, which was then subject to pain, is now transfigured and immune from suffering. Ah, beloved Lord, if my heart had the love of all hearts, if my conscience had the clarity of all angels, and my soul the beauty of all souls, if I were worthy of it by Thy grace, Lord, then would I fain receive Thee to-day as lovingly and submerge Thee into the depths of my heart and my soul, so that neither life nor death would ever divide me from Thee.³

Ah, sweet, fair Lord, if Thou, my chosen Love, hadst done nothing more than to send me Thy messenger, I should not know how in the whole world I should have received him well enough. How then ought I to behave toward Him, the One

¹ St. John iii, 12.

² In Middle High German *ich darf* means 'I need' (*ich bedarf*), not 'I may', as in Modern German.

³ Romans viii, 38-9.

whom my soul loves?¹ For Thou art the only One in whom all things are included that my heart can desire in time or eternity. Or is there anything else that my soul could desire, apart from Thee, that Thou art not? I will say nothing of that which is against Thee or without Thee, for that would be abhorrent to me. Thou art indeed the very fairest to the eyes, the very sweetest to the taste, the very gentlest to the touch, the most loving to the heart. Lord, I neither see nor hear, nor can my soul feel anything, in all that is, without finding each one a thousand times more lovely in Thee, my chosen One. Ah, beloved Lord, how should I conduct myself in my wonder and my joy? Thy presence inflames me, but Thy majesty terrifies me. My reason wishes to honour its Lord, but my heart wishes to love, and affectionately embrace its only Love, and, if I dare say it, my beloved Spouse. Ah, what love, what bliss, what joy, what honour I have in Thee alone!

Ah, sweet Lord, it seemed to me for this reason that, if only the grace were granted me to receive in my mouth one single little drop from the open wounds of the heart of my Beloved, I should have my heart's desire. Ah, what a most gracious, incomprehensible miracle! I have now received, not only from His heart, or from His hands and feet and all His tender wounds, I have not only received one or two little drops, I have received all His rosy warm blood, through my mouth, into my heart and soul. Is not that a great thing? Ought I not to esteem that which is most valued by all the high angels?² Is not that a lovely thing? Lord, I would that all my limbs, and all I am and know, could be transformed into boundless love, in return for this lovely token of Thy love. Lord, what else is there in all this world that my heart could enjoy or desire, when Thou givest Thyself to me so lovingly to enjoy and to love. It is well called a sacrament of love. Where was ever anything more lovable heard or seen than becoming love itself by grace?³

¹ Canticles iii, 4.

² Who do not even dare to aspire to it, as Suso says in his *Horologium*, p. 181, ed. Strange.

³ Nothing is more lovable than that the soul should by union with love become love itself, by grace.

Lord, I see no difference, except that my Lord Simeon received Thee visibly, and I invisibly. But just as little as my bodily eye can now see Thy true humanity, just as little could his bodily eye see Thy Divinity, except by faith, as I do now. Lord, what strength can I derive from this physical sight? He to whom the eyes of the spirit are opened, does not give much heed to physical sight, for the eyes of the spirit see more truly and really. Lord, if only I knew by faith, as far as one can know, that I have Thee there,¹ what more can I want? For then I have all that my heart desires. Lord, it is a thousand times more profitable to me that I cannot see Thee. How could I ever bring myself to eat Thee in corporeal form? But, by this means, that which is lovely remains, and that which is repugnant falls away. Lord, when I consider with what unfathomable wisdom, how beautifully, in what an orderly manner Thou hast ordained all things, my heart cries out with a loud voice: 'O sublime riches of the abyss of Divine wisdom,² what art Thou in Thyself, when Thou art so very great in Thy fair outpourings!'³

Now, loving Lord, consider the desire of my heart! Lord, there was never a king or emperor who was so worthily received, no dear stranger guest was ever so affectionately embraced, no bride so beautifully or so tenderly brought home, or so honourably treated, as my soul desires to receive Thee today,⁴ my most noble Emperor, the sweetest guest of my heart, the most lovely bride of my soul, and lead Thee into the innermost and best that my heart and soul can attain, and offer it to Thee as worthily as it was ever offered Thee by any creature. Lord, teach me how to conduct myself towards Thee, and how to receive Thee beautifully and lovingly enough.

ETERNAL WISDOM: Thou shouldst receive Me worthily, and enjoy Me humbly, and entertain Me earnestly, enfold Me with the love of a spouse, hold Me before thine eyes in divine honour. Spiritual hunger and real devotion should drive thee to Me more than mere habit. The soul which desires to experi-

¹ In the Sacrament.

² Romans xi, 33.

³ The creation.

⁴ The loose construction is in the original. It is characteristic of Suso.

ence Me sincerely, and enjoy Me sweetly, in the secret cell of a detached life, must first be scrubbed clean of its infirmities, be adorned with virtues, decorated with liberty, covered with the red roses of fervent love, strewn with the fair violets of humble self-abasement and the white lilies of true purity. It ought to pray to me in peace of mind, for in peace is My dwelling place.¹ It ought to embrace Me in its arms, to the exclusion of all alien love, for I avoid and flee from this, as the wild bird flees from the cage. It should sing the song of Sion,² that is, fervent love with boundless praise, for I will embrace it, and it shall lean on My heart. If a quiet rest, a clear gaze, a peculiar enjoyment, a foretaste of eternal sweetness, and a feeling of eternal bliss, come to the soul, may it hold these things to itself and retain them, for the stranger does not experience them. May it say with an unfathomable sigh: 'Truly Thou art the hidden God.'³ Thou art the secret Good, that no one can know who has not experienced it.'

THE SERVANT: Alas, for the great blindness in which I have hitherto lived! I plucked the red roses and did not smell them; I went among the fair flowers and did not see them; I was like a dry bough in the midst of the sweet dew of May.⁴ Alas, I can never regret enough that Thou hast been so near to me for so many a day, and I have been so far from Thee! Alas, Thou sweet guest of the pure soul, how have I welcomed Thee hitherto, how often I have given Thee a poor welcome! How indifferently I have behaved towards the sweet food of angels! I have had the noble balsam in my mouth, and have not felt it! Oh, thou joyful feast of the eyes of all angels, I have never rejoiced in Thee aright! If an earthly friend were coming to me in the morning, I should have looked forward to his visit all night. Yet I have never prepared myself for Thee, noble guest, whom heaven and earth honour, as I really should. Ah, how quickly have I turned away from Thee, how quickly have I driven Thee away from Thine own place! Alas, beloved God,

¹ Psalm lxxv, 2 (A.V. lxxvi, 2).

² Psalm cxxxvi, 3 (A.V. cxxxvii, 3).

³ Isaiah xlv, 15.

⁴ In this, and the preceding paragraph, we have Suso's poetic style at its best.

and art Thou Thyself so truly present here, and is the host of angels here, and I have acted so neglectfully! Lord, I will say nothing of Thee; indeed Lord, I know no place within many miles, where, if I had truly known of the presence of the holy angels, the lofty spirits which contemplate Thee at all times, I should gladly have gone thither, and even if I could not have seen them, my heart would still have rejoiced in my body because of them. Alas, sweet Lord, and that Thou Thyself, the Lord of all the angels, shouldst be present here, and with Thee a vast angelic host, alas, that I did not pay more heed to the place: I shall always regret it! For I should have bowed down at the place where I know Thee to be thus present, even if I had been unable to do aught else.

Alas, God, how often have I stood in the place where Thou wert before me and with me in the Sacrament, neither thoughtful nor devout! My body was there, but my heart was elsewhere. How often have I come into Thy presence, noble Lord, so thoughtlessly, that my heart did not even greet Thee with a devout bow! Lord, my gentle Lord, my eyes should have looked at Thee with a smile of joy; my heart should have fixed its attention on Thee with its whole desire; my mouth should have praised Thee with fervent, heartfelt jubilation; all my strength should have been poured into Thy joyful service! What did Thy servant David do, who before the ark, in which there were only bodily manna and bodily things, leapt so joyfully with all his might.¹

Lord, I now stand before Thee and the holy angels, and fall at Thy feet with contrite, heartfelt tears. Remember, remember, gentle Lord, that Thou art here before me, my flesh and my brother; pardon and forgive me to-day for all the dishonour I have ever shown Thee, for I am and always shall be sorry, for the light of wisdom is only just beginning to shine on me; and the place where Thou art, not only according to Thy Divinity, but also according to Thy fair, lovely humanity, shall be honoured by me henceforth and for ever.

Ah, beloved Good, noble Lord, and sweet Guest, my soul would fain ask a question: Gentle Lord, tell me, what dost

¹ II Kings vi, 14 (A.V. II Samuel vi, 14).

Thou bring to Thy beloved with Thy real presence in the Sacrament, if she receives Thee in love and desire?

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: Is this a fitting question for a lover? What better gift have I than Myself? If anyone has his love himself, what more could he ask for? If anyone gives himself, what has he held back? I give Myself to thee, and take thee out of thyself, and unite Myself with thee; thou lovest thyself, and art transformed into Me.¹ What does the sun give in its most beautiful shining rays to the unclouded air? What does the bright morning star give at dawn to the dark night? Or what lovely adornment does the fair joy of summer give after the cold, sad winter time?

THE SERVANT: Ah, Lord, they bring rich gifts.

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: They seem rich to thee, because they are visible to thee. See, the smallest grace² that flows from Me in the Sacrament is more brilliant in eternity than are any of the natural rays of the sun. It is brighter than any morning star; it adorns thee in eternal loveliness more beautifully than any summer blossom ever adorned the earth. Is not My bright Divinity more glorious than any sun, My noble soul more brilliant than any star, My transfigured body, which thou hast truly received to-day, more lovely than any summer joy?

THE SERVANT: Alas, Lord, why then are they not more tangible? Lord, I often approach the altar in such hardness³ that I am just as devoid of all light, grace, and sweetness, so it seems to me, as a man born blind, who never saw the light. Lord, if I dare say so, I would fain wish in Thy real presence that Thou hadst given more proof of Thyself.⁴

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: The smaller the proof the purer the faith, and the greater the reward. The Lord of nature brings about in so many beautiful trees a charming growth, which nevertheless no eye or intelligence can perceive, until it is completed. I am not there as a light shining forth, I am not a Good

¹ St. Augustine, *Confessions*, vii, 10.

² Sanctifying, as opposed to actual grace.

³ Aridity.

⁴ In the Sacrament.

that works outwards, I am an inwardly working Good, and that is all the more noble because it is more spiritual.

THE SERVANT: Alas, God, how few men there are who thoroughly consider what they receive in it. They approach, as others are wont to do, in a bad, thoughtless way, and hence, just as they arrive empty, they also leave without grace; they do not masticate the food,¹ or consider what they receive there.

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: I am the living bread for those who are well prepared, the dry bread for those who are badly prepared, but to the wholly unprepared I am a temporal blow,² a deadly fall, and an eternal curse.

THE SERVANT: Alas, Lord, what a terrifying thought this is! Ah, gentle Lord, whom dost Thou call the well prepared and the unprepared?

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: The well prepared are the purified, the badly prepared those who are impeded, but the unprepared are the sinful, who are in mortal sin, by their will or their works.

THE SERVANT: Alas, gentle Lord, but if, at the time, the sinner is heartily sorry for his sins, and does his best to be liberated from them, according to the teachings of the Church?³

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: Then that man is no longer in mortal sin at that moment.

THE SERVANT: Lord, it seems to me this is one of the greatest things that all time can accomplish. Lord, who is there that lives on earth, who can prepare himself worthily enough for Thee?

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: That man was never born; and if a man had the natural spirituality of all the angels, the purity of all saints, and the good works of all men, he would still be unworthy of Me.

THE SERVANT: Alas, beloved Lord, with what trembling should we worthless, graceless men draw near to Thee!

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: If man does what is in his

¹ In the spiritual sense.

² A punishment in this world.

³ Which prescribe confession and absolution before communion.

power, no more is demanded from him; for what is left unaccomplished is completed by God. A sick man should cast aside all timidity, and approach his physician, whose aid is his healing.

THE SERVANT: Beloved Lord, which is better: to receive Thee in the Sacrament often or rarely?

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: To those persons to whom grace and devotion noticeably accrue therefrom, diligent appearance¹ is helpful.

THE SERVANT: Lord, what then, if a man, according to his understanding, stands still,² or is often in great hardness?

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: A man should not abstain to a marked degree because of hardness, provided he does his part; because the salvation of his soul, which, by God's permission, is in a state of hardness, is often perfected as nobly in the light of pure faith as in great sweetness. I am a Good that grows with use, and dies away if hoarded up. It is better to approach from love than to desist from fear. It is better to approach earnestly once every week with a deep fund of true humility, than once a year with pride in one's own righteousness.

THE SERVANT: Lord, at what time does the inflow of grace from the Sacrament take place?

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: At the actual moment of communicating.³

THE SERVANT: Gentle Lord, what if a man feels unbounded longing for Thy bodily presence in the Sacrament, but he is compelled to do without Thee?

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: Many persons are full of Me when abstaining (from Communion), and many feel the lack of Me at the altar. The latter only masticate Me physically, but the former enjoy Me spiritually.

THE SERVANT: Gentle Lord, but has the man who receives Thee both physically and spiritually any advantage over those who enjoy Thee spiritually?

¹ At the altar.

² Makes no spiritual progress, derives no benefit.

³ St. Thomas, *Summa Theologica*, III, Qu. 80, a. 8, ad 6.

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: Which man has more: he who has both Me and My grace, or he who has only My grace?

THE SERVANT: Lord, how long remainest Thou in physical presence with the man who receives Thee?

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: As long as the form and outward appearance of the elements remains.¹

Thou art to say this, when going up²

Ah, Thou living fruit, Thou sweet jewel, Thou lovely pomegranate of the flowery paternal heart, Thou sweet grape of Cyprus in the vineyard of Engaddi,³ who will grant that I may receive Thee to-day so worthily that Thou wilt be delighted to come to me, to remain with me, and never to be separated from me? Ah, unfathomable Good, that fillest the kingdoms of heaven and earth, do thou but bend graciously towards me, and despise not Thy poor creature! Lord, if I am not worthy of Thee, I am nevertheless in need of Thee. Ah, gentle Lord, art Thou not He who created heaven and earth with one single word? Lord, with one single word Thou canst heal my sick soul.⁴ Alas, gentle Lord, do with me according to Thy grace, according to Thy boundless mercy, and not according to my deserts. Thou art indeed the innocent Paschal Lamb, that is sacrificed to-day for the sins of all men. Ah, sweet, delicious manna, that has in itself⁵ all sweet tastes to the desire of every heart,⁶ give delight in Thyself to-day to the dry mouth of my soul. Nourish me and give me to drink, strengthen and adorn me, and unite Thyself lovingly with me! Ah, Eternal Wisdom, come now to-day so powerfully into my soul that Thou dost expel all my foes, melt away all my infirmities, and forgive all my sins. Enlighten my understanding with the light of Thy true faith, inflame my will with Thy sweet love, illumine my

¹ Ibid., Qu. 76, a. 6, ad. 3.

² To communicate.

³ Canticles i, 13 (A.V. i, 14).

⁴ St. Matthew viii, 8.

⁵ Note the change of person.

⁶ Wisdom xvi, 20.

memory¹ with Thy cheerful presence, and give virtue and perfection to all my powers. Guard me in the hour of death, that I may enjoy Thee openly in eternal bliss. Amen.

¹ See above, p. 85, note 1.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

How one should praise God exuberantly at all times

'Praise the Lord, O my soul. While I live will I praise the Lord.'¹ Ah, God, who will grant that my full heart may attain its desire to praise Thee before my death? Who will grant that in my lifetime I may worthily praise my beloved Lord, whom my soul loveth.² Ah, gentle Lord, if only as many beautiful tunes could proceed from my heart as there have ever been strange, sweet stringed instruments, and as much as there is foliage and grass, and if they were all lifted up towards Thee in the heavenly courts, so that from my heart such a lovely, unheard-of paean of praise arose, that it would be well pleasing in the eyes of Thy heart and delightful to all the heavenly host! Beloved Lord, if I am not worthy to praise Thee, nevertheless my soul desires that the sky should praise Thee, when, in its most lovely beauty, it is resplendent in its exalted clarity with the brilliance of the sun and with the countless number of the bright stars; and the fair meadows in their summer dress, adorned by varied flowers, shine as befits their native nobility in joyful loveliness; and ah, all the sweet thoughts and fervent desires which a pure heart ever had towards Thee, when surrounded by the gay summer joy of Thy enlightening Spirit.

Lord, when I but think of Thy high praise, my heart is near to melting in my body, my thoughts take flight, words fail me, and all melodies escape me. Something flashes into my heart that no one can express in words, when I wish to praise Thee, the Good without form, for if I go up to the most beautiful of creatures, the highest of all spirits,³ Thou dost surpass them all inexpressibly; then, if I go down into the deep abyss of Thine

¹ Psalm cxlv, 1 (A.V. cxlvi, 1-2).

² Canticles i, 6 (A.V. i, 5).

³ The angels.

own Good, Lord, all praise disappears, so small it is. Lord, when I gaze at pretty living forms, attractive creatures, they say to my heart: 'Ah, behold, how truly attractive is He from whom we have emanated, from whom all beauty is derived.' I traverse heaven and earth, the world and the abyss, wood and heath, hill and dale; they all cry out together in my ears a rich song of Thy boundless praise. Then, when I see with what infinite beauty and order Thou hast disposed all things, both good and evil, I am speechless. Lord, whenever I think that Thou, the praiseworthy Good, art He whom my soul has chosen for itself as its only beloved Love, alas, Lord, then my heart is fit to break with praise.

Ah, gentle Lord, consider now the deep desire of my heart and soul, and teach me to praise Thee, teach me how to laud Thee worthily, before I depart hence, for my soul thirsts for it¹ in my body.

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: Wouldst thou gladly praise Me?

THE SERVANT: Alas, Lord, why dost Thou tempt me? Dost Thou not know all hearts? Thou knowest that my heart in my body would fain be transformed because of the true desire which I have had for Thee since the days of my childhood.

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: It is fitting that the righteous should praise Me.²

THE SERVANT: Alas, Lord, all my righteousness depends on Thy boundless mercy. Loving Lord, even the frogs in the ditches praise Thee and, if they cannot sing, at least they can croak. Alas, gentle Lord, I know and recognize full well who I am. Lord, I know quite well that I should rather plead for my sins than praise Thee, but nevertheless, Thou unfathomable Good, despise not in me, unsightly worm that I am, the desire to praise Thee. Lord, now that Seraphim and Cherubim, and the great number of sublime spirits all praise Thee to the very best of their powers, what more can they do than the very smallest creature, with regard to the infinite glory that is above all praise? Lord, Thou art free from all need of the creatures,³

¹ The power to praise God rightly.

² Psalm xxxii, 1 (A.V. xxxiii, 1).

³ Psalm xv, 2. (Different reading in A.V. xvi, 2.)

but Thy boundless goodness is all the better recognized, the more undeservedly Thou givest Thyself.

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: Whosoever thinks he is praising Me completely and worthily, is like one who chases the wind and would seize a shadow. Yet thou and every creature are permitted to praise Me to the best of your ability. For there never was any creature that was so small or so great, so good or so evil, nor ever will there be, that does not either praise Me, or show Me to be praiseworthy.

And the more closely it is united to Me, the more praiseworthy I am to it; and the more thy praise is like the praise of eternal glory, the more laudable it is to Me. And the praise is the more similar,¹ the more it is freed from all images of creatures, and united with Me in true devotion.

Sincere meditation sounds better in My ears than any praise in words alone, and a heartfelt sigh sounds better than a loud cry.² Humble self-abasement in true submission to God and all men, in the desire to be naught, sounds better before Me than any beautiful notes of music. Never did I appear so laudable to My Father on earth as when I hung on the Cross in the deepest pangs of death. Some people praise Me only with fair words, but their heart is far from Me,³ and to such praise I pay little heed. On the other hand, there are some who praise Me well, when things go according to their wishes, but when things begin to go ill, the praise ceases: such praise is displeasing to Me. But praise is worthy in My Divine eyes when thou dost praise Me whole-heartedly by thy words and works, as sincerely in sorrow as in joy, in all afflictions just as when things go well with thee, for then thou dost consider Me and not thyself.

THE SERVANT: Lord, I ask not that suffering should come from Thee, nor will I give occasion for it, but I will now devote myself wholly, according to the desire of my heart, to Thy eternal praise, since I have never been able to abandon myself aright of my own accord. Lord, if Thou didst ordain that I should become the most despised man that this earth could

¹ To that of heaven.

² The rhyme is in the original.

³ Isaiah xxix, 13.

bring forth, Lord, I would endure it out of love, to Thy glory. Lord, I give myself up to-day to Thy grace, and if I should be accused of the greatest crime that ever any man committed, and if everyone who saw me spat in my face, Lord, I would gladly suffer it to Thy glory, provided that I might be innocent in Thy eyes. But if I were guilty, I would suffer it again in praise of Thy Divine justice, the honour of which is a thousand times dearer to me than my own honour. With each insult I would give Thee a special word of praise, and I would say with the robber on the Cross: 'Lord, I suffer justly, but what hast Thou done? Lord, remember me in Thy kingdom.'¹ And if at this moment Thou shouldst take me away hence, and it were to Thy glory, I would not look back to gain time; but if I were to live as long as Methuselah, I should ask for this: that every year of the long time, and every week of those years, every day of the weeks, every hour of the days, and every minute of the hours, should praise Thee for me, with such lovely praise as no saint ever paid Thee in the true glory of the saints, praises as numerous as the motes of dust in the sunshine, and wishing that they might carry out my good desires, as if I had myself accomplished them all in this life.

Lord, take me therefore to Thyself, sooner or later, for that is my heart's desire. Lord, I will say more: if I were to go hence just now, and it were to Thy glory, might I burn in purgatory for fifty years: Lord, I bow beneath Thy feet in Thy praise and accept it all willingly to Thy eternal glory. Blessed be the purgatory in which Thy glory might be fulfilled in me! Lord, Thou and not I; Thou art the very One, that I love and aspire to, and seek, and not I. Lord, Thou knowest all things, and seest all hearts. Thou knowest that I am firmly decided, and if I even knew that I was to be for ever in the bottom of hell, however much pain the deprivation of Thy fair vision would inflict on my poor wretched heart, I would not on that account break with Thee. And if I could bring back again all the time lost by all men, make amends for their misdeeds, and fully atone for all the dishonour that ever befell Thee, by praise and honour, and even if it were possible, then from the lowest pit of hell fair

¹ St. Luke xxiii, 41-2.

praise would rise up from me, penetrating hell, earth, air, and all the heavens, until it came to Thy Divine face. But, as it would be impossible, behold, I would fain praise Thee here all the better that I might enjoy Thee here all the more.

Lord, do with me, Thy poor creature, as Thy praise requires, for, come what may, I will sing Thy praise as long as there is breath in my mouth. And when speech fails me, I ask that the raising of my finger may be a confirmation and corroboration of all the praise that I have ever uttered. And even when my body has turned to dust, I ask that from each grain of dust eternal praise may pierce through the hard stone, through all the heavens up to Thy Divine face until the Last Day, when body and soul will be united again in Thy praise.

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: In this desire be steadfast until death; that is fair praise to Me.

THE SERVANT: Ah, loving Lord, since Thou dost now deign to accept praise from me, poor sinful man, I ask Thee to explain these things to me: Lord, is the external praise that is given by words and song at all profitable?

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: It is very profitable, and especially in so far as it is able to stimulate the inward man, who is often stimulated thereby, and above all in the case of beginners.

THE SERVANT: Gentle Lord, I still have in me a desire (since one would fain begin in time what one is to do in eternity), to achieve assiduous praise within me, and that it may never be interrupted for so much as a moment. Lord, I have often said of this desire: 'Alas, heaven, why dost thou hasten? Why dost thou run so fast? I ask thee to stand still at this point, until I have finished praising my only beloved, gentle Lord, according to my heart's desire.' Lord, sometimes, when I have gone for a short while without being occupied with Thy praise, I have said, when I came to myself: 'Alas, Lord, it is a thousand years since I thought of my Beloved!' Ah, teach me now, loving Lord, as far as it is possible, as long as there is life in my body, to achieve steadfast, unchanging praise!

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: Those who fix their attention on Me in all things, and guard against sin, and devote themselves to virtue, they praise Me at all times. But nevertheless,

since thou dost pursue the highest praise, hear more. The soul is like a light fluffy feather: if it be not fastened to anything, it is easily carried high up towards the sky by its natural mobility, but when it is at all weighted down, it falls. In the same fashion, a mind purified from the heaviness of its frailties is raised up towards heavenly things by its natural nobility, with the light help of spiritual meditation; and hence, whenever it happens that the mind is freed from all physical desire, and is established in peace, all its intent is fastened inseparably to the unchangeable Good at all times. For in purity, as far as a man can express it, the human intelligence is drowned and transformed from earthliness into the likeness of the spiritual and angelic. Whatever man receives from outside, what he does, what he works, whether he is eating, drinking, sleeping or watching: all that is nothing but the purest praise.

THE SERVANT: Ah, my gentle Lord, what a very sweet doctrine this is! Lovely Wisdom, I would gladly be instructed by Thee about four more things. The first is this: Lord, where can I find the greatest reasons to praise Thee?

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: In the first source of all good, and then in the outflowing streams.¹

THE SERVANT: Lord, the source is too high for me and too unfamiliar. For this the tall cedars of the Lebanon of heavenly spirits and angelic souls should praise Thee. And yet, as a rough thistle I will henceforth press forward to praise Thee, so that they² may be reminded of their high dignity by the sight of the complete powerlessness of my desire,³ and so that in their pure clarity they may be inspired to praise Thee earnestly, just as the cuckoo may give the nightingale occasion for a beautiful song. But the outpouring of Thy goodness is a fitting subject for my praise. Lord, when I recollect aright who I was, from what and how often Thou hast saved me, from what terror, what bonds, from what snares, Thou has liberated me, ah, eternal Good, it is strange that my heart does not fully melt away in Thy praise! Lord, how long hast Thou not waited for me, how kindly hast

¹ Created things.

² The angels.

³ To praise Him.

Thou received me, how sweetly hast thou secretly anticipated me, and inwardly admonished me! Ungrateful as I ever was for this, Thou hast never let me go until Thou hast drawn me to Thee. Am I not to praise Thee for this? Yes, indeed, Lord! My tender Lord, I ask that for this reason rich praise may rise up to Thine eyes, such as was the great joyous praise that the angels gave Thee, when they first saw their own constancy¹ and the punishment of others,² and like the joy that wretched souls feel when they come out of the bondage of the fierce fires³ into Thy presence, and for the first time contemplate Thy lovely face; and like the infinite praise that will break out in the streets of Heaven after the Last Judgment, when the elect are separated from the wicked in everlasting bliss.

Lord, there is one thing more that I wish to know about Thy praise, that is, how can I devote all my natural good to Thy eternal glory?

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: Since no one in this life can make any real distinction between nature and grace by natural knowledge, hence, whether it comes from nature or grace, if anything delightful, anything joyous or glad, rises up in thy mind or thy body, turn quickly, offering it to God, so that it may be used for My praise, for I am the Lord of nature and of grace, and in this way nature is at once transformed into the supernatural.

THE SERVANT: Lord, but how can I turn the insinuations of evil spirits to Thy eternal glory?

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: When evil spirits make their suggestions, say: 'Lord, every time this evil spirit, or any other one, sends such evil thoughts to me against my will, may the most beautiful praise of all be sent up by me instead, just as often in everlasting eternity, with deliberate intention, with which⁴ this evil spirit would have praised Thee in everlasting eternity, if he had not fallen,⁵ so that I may praise Thee as the substitute of him, the exile; and as often as he whispers his vile,

¹ The beatific vision, as a reward of their fidelity to God.

² The fallen angels.

³ Of purgatory.

⁴ 'Praise' is understood.

⁵ When the angels, led by Lucifer, rebelled against God.

evil insinuations, so often may a good thought be sent up to Thee!

THE SERVANT: Lord, I now see that all things work together for good for good men,¹ since the greatest evil of the evil spirit may also be turned to good.

Now tell me one thing more: ah, loving Lord, how then can I turn everything that I see or hear to Thy praise?

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: Every time thou seest a great multitude, whensoever thou beholdest anything that is beyond measure beautiful or abundant, say every time from the bottom of thy heart: 'Lord, may the thousand thousand angelic spirits that serve Thee greet Thee to-day lovingly in my stead, as often and as beautifully as this, and may the ten thousand times a hundred thousand spirits who stand before Thee² praise Thee to-day for me, and may all the holy prayers of all the saints pray for me, and may the lovely beauty of all creatures honour Thee for me.'

THE SERVANT: Ah, loving God, how Thou hast refreshed and rejoiced my soul by Thy praise!

Lord, but this temporal praise has reminded my heart, it has made my soul long, ah, yes, for the eternal everlasting praise! Alas, my chosen Wisdom, when is the bright day to dawn, when is the joyful hour to come for me to leave this exile, perfectly prepared to meet my Beloved, alas, that I may see Thee and praise Thee joyfully? Lord, truly I begin to yearn so much, I begin to long so deeply for the only joy of my heart. Alas, when shall I ever go there? How long it is,³ how time drags before I can see the delight of my heart face to face, and enjoy Thee to my heart's delight! O exile, how wretched thou art to a man who truly considers himself homeless! Lord, look, there is scarcely anyone on earth who has not someone whom he can seek, to find a place of refuge, where his foot can rest awhile. Alas, my only One, whom my soul seeks and desires, Thou knowest that I am one of those who are abandoned to Thee alone. Lord, whatever I see and hear, wherein I find Thee not,

¹ Romans viii, 28.

² Daniel vii, 10. Apocalypse v, 11.

³ Psalms cxix, 5 (A.V. cxx, 5 has a different reading).

is a torture to me; the society of all men, save for Thy sake, is a bitterness to me. Lord, what is there to encourage me, what could support me?

Reply of ETERNAL WISDOM: Thou shouldst often walk in this fair lovely garden full of the flowers of My praise. In this world there is no more real foretaste of the heavenly home, than those¹ who praise God in joyful gladness. There is nothing that will so lift up a man's soul and lighten his sufferings, that will drive away the evil spirits, and dispel depression, as joyous praise. God is near them;² the angels are their friends; they are helpful to themselves. It edifies one's neighbour and rejoices souls; all the heavenly host is honoured by this gladsome praise.

THE SERVANT: Loving Lord, my gentle Eternal Wisdom, I ask that whenever my eyes first open in the morning, my heart may open likewise, and that from it a flaming, fiery torch of love may send up Thy praise, with the fairest love of the most loving heart in the world, like the most ardent love of the highest spirit of the Seraphim in eternity, and like the boundless love wherewith Thou, heavenly Father, lovest Thy beloved Son in the radiant love of Your two spirits. And may the praise sound as sweetly to Thy paternal heart, as in this world the sweet music of all lovely instruments ever sounded, in its own way, to a free soul. May a sweet odour of praise flare up from the torch of love, as though specially distilled from all the noble herbs and aromatic roots, full of virtue, and pulverized together in their purest form; and may his appearance be so beautifully filled with grace, that the May in its wonderful blossom was never so fairly adorned, that he may be a joyful sight in Thy Divine eyes and to all the heavenly host. And I ask that the torch of love may at all times flare up in all my prayers, from my mouth, in my song, my thoughts, words and works, that they may drive away all my foes, that all my infirmities may disappear, that I may pray for grace and attain a blessed end, that the close of this temporal praise may be the beginning of the everlasting and eternal praise. Amen.

¹ I.e. the society of those who praise God.

² Those who thus praise God.

Third Part

The Hundred Meditations and requests in short words, as they are said every day with devotion

He who desires to be able to meditate briefly, rightly and earnestly, on the loving Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ, on whom all our salvation rests, and would fain be grateful to Him for His manifold sufferings, should learn by heart these Hundred Meditations¹ which are hereafter summarized, at least according to the sense that is expressed in the few words, and he should devoutly repeat them every day with a hundred *venias*,² or in whatsoever way is most convenient for him, and should say with every *venia* a *Paternoster* or a *Salve Regina*, or an *Ave Maria*, when they refer to Our Lady.³ For it was in this manner that they were once revealed by God to a Preacher, when he was standing in front of a crucifix before Matins, and earnestly complained to God that he could not meditate on His Passion, and that it was so painful to him to meditate on it,⁴ for until that hour he had had such difficulty in doing so and these difficulties were now taken away. He later added by himself the request briefly, so that everyone could find occasion in himself to ask according to his mind.

1. Ah, Eternal Wisdom, my heart reminds Thee how Thou wert on the mountain, after the Last Supper, when Thou wert covered by bloody sweat, in the anguish of Thy gentle heart.

2. And how Thou wert captured by Thy foes, harshly bound and cruelly led away;

3. Lord, how Thou wert shamefully ill-treated in the night.

¹ The Hundred Meditations were arranged in sets of five or ten, so that they could be said at the canonical hours, or spread over the days of the week.

² See above, page 43.

³ See p. 51.

⁴ See above, p. 43.

Thou wert scourged, and spat upon, and Thy fair eyes were blindfolded;

4. Early in the morning, found guilty before Caiaphas, and delivered to death;

5. Contemplated by Thy gentle Mother with boundless grief;

6. Thou wert shamefully brought before Pilate, falsely accused, and condemned to death;

7. Thou, Eternal Wisdom, wert mocked as a fool before Herod, in white garments;

8. Thy fair body was painfully disfigured and bruised by the cruel lashes of the scourge;

9. Thy gentle head was pierced by sharp thorns, so that Thy loving face was covered with blood;

10. Thou wert thus wretchedly condemned, and shamefully led out to Thy death with the Cross.

Ah, my only hope, be mindful of this, that Thou mayst come to my help in fatherly love in all my need. Release me from my sinful heavy bonds, guard me from secret sins and open crimes. Protect me from the false counsels of the fiend, and from all occasion of sin; give me heartfelt sympathy for Thy Passion and the sufferings of Thy gentle Mother. Lord, judge me mercifully at my last end; teach me to despise worldly honour, and to serve Thee wisely. All my failings will be healed in Thy wounds; my intelligence will be adorned and strengthened against all temptation by the pain of Thy sacred head; and Thy whole Passion will be imitated by me to the best of my powers.

1. Beloved Lord, how, on the high branch of the Cross, Thy clear eyes were dimmed and lost their lustre;

2. Thy Divine ears were filled with mockery and insult;

3. Thy noble sense of smell was offended by an evil stench;

4. Thy sweet mouth by a bitter draught;

5. Thy gentle sense of touch by hard blows.

Hence I ask Thee to guard mine eyes this day from all vain seeing, mine ears from all frivolous hearing. Lord, take away from me all the savour of physical things; make distasteful to me all that is temporal; and take away from me the delicacy of the body.

1. Gentle Lord, how Thy Divine head was bowed down by pain and anguish.

2. Thy fair throat was cruelly struck.

3. Thy pure face all covered with spittle and clotted blood.

4. Thy clear complexion was discoloured.

5. All Thy fair form was perishing.

Grant therefore, my Lord, that I may love physical discomfort, and seek all my rest in Thee, suffer willingly evil from others, desire contempt, die to my desires, and put to death all my lusts.

1. Beloved Lord, how Thy right hand was pierced by the nail;

2. Thy left hand was transfixed;

3. Thy right arm was stretched out;

4. Thy left arm was dislocated;

5. Thy right foot was cut;

6. Thy left was savagely hacked through;

7. Thou didst hang there impotently;

8. And Thy Divine legs¹ were very weary;

9. All Thy tender limbs were immovably riveted to the narrow halter of the Cross;

10. The hot blood flowed in many places over Thy body.

Hence, Lord, I ask that I may be nailed to Thee immovably in joy and sorrow, that all my powers of body and soul be stretched on Thy Cross, my reason and my desires fixed to Thee. Grant me the inability to indulge in physical joys, and speed to seek Thy praise and honour. I ask that there may be no limb in my body that does not bear specially in itself Thy death, and exhibit a loving resemblance to Thy Passion.

1. Gentle Lord, Thy fair body was dried up and withered on the Cross;

2. Thy tired, tender back leaned painfully on the rough Cross;

3. Thy heavy body sagged down;

4. Thy whole body was wounded and bruised;

5. Lord, and Thy heart bore all this lovingly.

Lord, may Thy aridity be an eternal blossoming to me; may Thy hard leaning be a spiritual rest; Thy sagging down a

¹ See above, p. 58, n. 3.

powerful support. May all Thy pain soothe mine, and Thy loving heart inflame mine fervently.

1. Beloved Lord, in the pangs of death Thou wert mocked with scornful words;

2. With derisive gestures;

3. Thou wert annihilated in their hearts;

4. Thou didst bear this bravely;

5. And Thou didst pray lovingly for them to Thy dear Father;

6. Thou, the innocent Lamb, wert made like the guilty;

7. Condemned by the one on the left;

8. Invoked by the one on the right;

9. Thou forgavest him all his sins;

10. And didst open for him the heavenly paradise.

Now, dearest Lord, teach me, Thy servant, to endure steadfastly for Thy sake all scornful words, derisive gestures, and annihilation, and to excuse all my enemies lovingly before Thee. Ah, boundless Mercy, I offer Thee to-day Thy innocent death, before the eyes of the heavenly Father, in exchange for my guilty life. Lord, I call to Thee with the robber: 'Remember, O remember me in Thy kingdom.'¹ Condemn me not for my misdeeds, but forgive me all my sins; open up for me Thy heavenly paradise!

1. Gentle Lord, at this hour Thou wert deserted by all men for my sake;

2. Thy friends had forsaken Thee;

3. Thou stoodst naked and robbed of all honour and of clothing;

4. Thy strength then seemed vanquished;

5. They treated Thee unmercifully; and yet Thou didst suffer it all silently and meekly;

6. Alas, for Thy mild heart, when Thou alone didst fully know Thy gentle Mother's anguish of heart;

7. Thou didst see her yearning gestures;

8. And hear her lamentations;

9. And in the separation of death, commend her maternal love to Thy disciple;

¹ St. Luke xxiii, 42.

10. Commending to her Thy disciple's filial affection.

Alas, then, noble model of all virtues, take away from me the injurious love of all men, the disorderly affection of all friends. Strip me of all impatience; give me firmness in the presence of all evil spirits, and meekness towards all violent men. Gentle Lord, give me Thy bitter death in the bottom of my heart, in my prayers, and in the showing forth of good works. O tender Lord, I commend myself this day to the continual love and protection of Thy tender, pure Mother, and of Thy beloved disciple.

Salve Regina or Ave Maria.

1. Ah, pure, gentle Mother, I remind thee to-day of the boundless grief thou didst suffer at the first glance, on seeing thy dear Son, hanging up there in the pangs of death;

2. Thou couldst not then go to His help;

3. Thou hadst the painful sight of the murderers¹ of thy beloved Son;

4. Thou didst lament Him very sorrowfully;

5. And He comforted thee very kindly;

6. His kind words pierced thy heart;

7. Thy lamentable gestures softened the hard hearts;

8. Thy maternal hands and arms were sorrowfully raised up;

9. But thy weak² body fell powerlessly down;

10. Thy tender mouth kissed His outpoured blood lovingly.

Alas, now, Mother of all mercies, protect me maternally all my life; keep me graciously at my death. O tender Lady, see, that is the hour, for the sake of which I ask to be thy servant all my days. It is the dread hour of which heart and soul are terrified, for then it is too late for prayers and exclamations. Then I shall not know, poor man that I am, to whom I should turn.

Ah, therefore, thou unfathomable abyss of Divine mercy, I fall at thy feet this day with heartfelt sighs, praying that I may be found worthy of thy gladsome presence. Why can he despair, and what can harm him, whom thou, pure Mother, wilt protect? Ah, my only consolation, protect me from the wretched

¹ This is the reading of the oldest MSS. Later scribes substituted *ertöden* or *ersterben* (murder, death) for *ertötete* (murderers).

² *Krank* originally meant 'weak', not 'sick'.

sight of evil spirits. Come to my aid, and defend me from their hostile hands. May my wretched sighs be comforted by thee, my mortal weakness be kindly regarded by the eyes of thy mercy! May thy mild hands be outstretched to me, my wretched soul received by thee! May I be led by thy rosy countenance to the strict Judge, and established in eternal bliss!

1. O Thou, the beloved and the delight of the heavenly Father,¹ how Thou wert completely abandoned inwardly by all sweetness and consolation in that hour on the Cross, and abandoned to all the outer pain of bitter death;

2. Thou didst cry out to Thy Father wretchedly;

3. There was a complete union of Thy will with His;

4. Lord, Thou didst thirst physically with true dryness;

5. Thou didst thirst spiritually with great love;

6. A bitter draught was given to Thee to drink;

7. And when all things were accomplished, Thou didst say:
*Consummatum est.*²

8. Thou wert obedient to Thy beloved Father unto death;

9. Thou didst commend Thy soul to His fatherly hands;

10. And then Thy noble soul parted from Thy divine body.

Ah, beloved Lord, in this love I ask Thee mercifully to assist me in all my sufferings, to incline Thy fatherly ears to my cry at all times, and to give me in all things a will united to Thee. Lord, quench in me all thirst for physical things; make me thirst for spiritual things. Gentle Lord, may Thy bitter drink change all my tribulations to sweetness. Grant that I may remain steadfast unto death in right thinking and good works, and that I may never depart from Thy obedience.

Eternal Wisdom, may my spirit be committed this day into Thy hands, that it may be gladly received by Thee at its latter end. Lord, give me a life that is well-pleasing to Thee, a death that is well prepared, an end that Thou hast made secure. Lord, may Thy bitter death make my little works fruitful, so that in that hour guilt and penance may be fully forgiven and expiated.³

¹ Christ.

² 'It is finished.' (St. John xix, 30.)

³ Note the theological distinction between the forgiveness of sin (e.g. after confession) and the expiation of sin (by penance).

LITTLE BOOK OF ETERNAL WISDOM

1. Ah, Lord, remember how the sharp spear was thrust through Thy Divine side;

2. How the rosy coloured, precious blood flowed from it;

3. How the living water ran out; ...

4. O Lord, and how dearly Thou hast redeemed me;

5. And how freely Thou hast saved me!

Beloved Lord, may Thy deep wound protect me from all mine enemies; may Thy living water cleanse me from all my sins, Thy rosy coloured blood adorn me with all Thy grace and virtue. Gentle Lord, may Thy bitter redemption bind Thee to me; may Thy free salvation unite me eternally to Thee.

1. O thou chosen consolation of all sinners, sweet Queen, be reminded to-day of the time when thou didst stand beneath the Cross, and thy Son was dead, and hung thus in death before thee; how many sad upward glances thou didst cast;

2. In how motherly a manner were His arms received by thee;

3. With what affection were they pressed to thy blood-stained face;

4. And His fresh wounds, His deathly face, were kissed over and over again by thee;

5. How many mortal wounds thy heart then received;

6. How many deep, bottomless sighs thou didst heave;

7. How many bitter, wretched tears thou didst shed;

8. Thy sorrowful words were then so lamentable;

9. Thy lovely form was so very sorrowful;

10. But thy distressed heart was not to be comforted by any man.

Ah, pure Lady, be mindful of all this to-day, that thou mayst be a constant protector and faithful guide to me all my life. Turn thine eyes, thy mild eyes, mercifully towards me at all times. Receive me maternally whenever I seek thee; protect me faithfully from all mine enemies beneath thy gentle arms. May thy affectionate kissing of His wounds be to me a fair atonement with Him. May thy painful wounds¹ obtain true repentance for me. May thy deep sighs bring me to a steadfast desire; and may thy bitter tears soften my hard heart. May thy lamen-

¹ Thy sorrows.

tations be to me the renunciation of all idle speech. May thy sad demeanour be the rejection of all frivolous behaviour. May thy disconsolate heart be to me the contempt of all transient love!

1. O lovely splendour of eternal light, how completely art Thou now extinguished by this sight, as my soul itself embraces Thee beneath the Cross, on the lap of Thy sorrowful Mother, dead as Thou art, with lamentations and thanks! Extinguish in me the burning desire of every vice!

2. O pure, clear mirror of the Divine Majesty, how Thou art defiled because of love for me! Purify the great blemishes of my misdeeds!

3. O fair, bright image of the fatherly Goodness, how completely Thou art polluted! Restore the disfigured image of my soul!

4. O Thou innocent Lamb, how sadly Thou art ill-treated! Amend and repair my guilty, sinful life!

5. O Thou, King of Kings and Lord of Lords, grant that, as my soul embraces Thee with lamentation and grief in Thy abject state, it may be embraced by Thee joyfully in Thy eternal brightness!

1. Beloved, pure Mother, be reminded this day of thy sorrowful behaviour when they took thy dead Son away from thy heart;

2. Of the sad separation;

3. Of the wretched footsteps;

4. Of thy yearning heart that turned back;¹

5. And of the loyal constancy, which thou alone didst show Him in all His trials, as far as the grave.

Obtain this favour from thy gentle Son, that in thy sorrow and His grief I may overcome all my sorrow and grief; that I may be enclosed with Him in His grave, away from all temporal cares; that this whole world may bring me the wretchedness of exile; that I may have boundless longing for Him alone, and that I may remain steadfast in His praise and in thy service until the grave! Amen.

When all this had been prepared and written down on paper,

¹ Towards Christ.

there was still a portion to fill, in a section that belonged to our dear Lady; and he had left a blank space for it, until it should be revealed to him by God. For many a month he had been forsaken, so that it could not come to him. So he went to our dear Lady, in order that she might complete it, and on St. Dominic's Day,¹ in the night, when Matins had been sung for him,² he had a trance, in which it seemed to him as if he were in a room. And as he sat there, a fair youth came in with a beautiful harp, and with him there were four other youths with shawms. Then the youth with the harp sat down beside the friar, and began to play his harp, and to sound it sweetly. This was very pleasant for the friar to hear, and he said to him: 'O, if only thou wouldst come to the town where I live, to encourage me from time to time!'

Then the youth asked the friar if he had any other task³ to complete that he had been carrying on for some time. He said: 'Yes!' Then he answered and said: 'That is a hard game.' So the youth turned to the four with the shawms and told them to strike up. Then one of them answered, observing that two of them were enough. But the first would not agree, but told them all to strike up together, indicating to him some melody that he himself well understood. But the friar could not understand it. And this was done. Meanwhile, suddenly, he neither saw nor heard any instrument, but saw that the youths had in their hands an image of our dear Lady, lovely beyond compare, and it was embroidered in cloth, and the mantle on the image was all red and purple, with strange damask work, which was a lovely sight, and the field was as white as snow.

The friar was amazed at it; he rejoiced in the sight, and noticed that they wanted to complete it and were finishing the field first. Then they said: 'Look, how it grows!' Then he saw it finished; and one of them took needle and thread, and made in front of the mantle very clever little stitches crosswise, and they were so very fine, and adorned our Lady so beautifully! And,

¹ 4th August.

² St. Dominic.

³ Ascetic practices. According to Denifle, however, the reference is to the blank space in the book.

meanwhile, his eyes were opened, and he understood that he should have no further doubts, that it had been granted to him to complete the blank space, and the devotional picture, which had been so long withheld from him. For he was accustomed to receive what has gone before, all very distinctly in some kind of allegorical form.¹ And so in the morning he immediately finished it to the end.²

This little book is called *The Little Book of Eternal Wisdom*; its purpose is to kindle again in some hearts Divine love, which in many hearts, in these latter days, is beginning to be extinguished. Its subject-matter is, from beginning to end, the loving Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ, and to show how a pious man must follow this example to the best of his ability, and to tell of the worthy praise and unspeakable sufferings of the pure Queen of heaven. And ten themes are combined therein, in a secret manner, which themes are specially noble and useful:³

1. How some men are drawn to God without their knowledge.

2. Of sincere repentance and mild forgiveness.

3. How loving God is, and how deceitful the world is.

An explanation of three things in God, which might repel a lover most:

4. The first is: How He can appear so angry, and yet be so loving.

5. The second: Why He so often withdraws Himself from His lovers, after giving them joy; and how one can recognize His true presence.

6. The third: Why God allows His friends to suffer so much in this world. And this comprises:

7. Of the everlasting woe of hell;

8. Of the unutterable joys of heaven;

9. Of the immeasurable nobility of temporal suffering;

10. Of the ineffable good of the contemplation of the Divine sufferings.

¹ The preceding portions of the book were revealed to him in detail by Divine inspiration.

² The following pages are omitted in the editions of Diepenbrock, but they are to be found in the oldest MSS., apart from the last paragraph.

³ The following passage is a kind of index to the work.

The second part of this little book:

1. How one should learn to die.
2. How one should live inwardly.
3. How one should receive God lovingly.
4. How one should praise God at all times without stint.

The third part contains the *Hundred Meditations* in a few words, as one should say them with devotion every day.

Whosoever wishes to copy this little book, which is written and arranged with skill, should write it all as to the words and the sense, exactly as it stands here, and not add to it, or take anything away from it. Then he should completely revise it, once or twice, and should not copy any part of it separately, except the *Hundred Contemplations* at the end. He may extract these, if he so desires. If anyone does aught else, he should fear the punishment of God, for he robs God of His worthy praise, and men of improvement, and the man who has worked upon it of his labour. And therefore, if anyone does not wish to leave it alone, for these reasons, may he be punished by Eternal Wisdom.¹

¹ This warning was not taken very seriously by some later scribes. Its authenticity has been questioned, but it is quite in harmony with Suso's known attitude to his works, and especially to this book.

Little Book of Truth

PROLOGUE

Of inner abandonment and good distinctions which are to be observed in intellectual matters

‘For behold, Thou hast loved truth: the uncertain and hidden things of Thy wisdom Thou hast made manifest to me.’¹

There was a man in Christ who, in his young days, had exercised the outward man in all the ways which beginners are wont to practise,² but the inward man remained untrained in the highest abandonment.³ Then he felt indeed that something must be lacking in him, but he knew not what it was. And when he had thus lived for a long time, and for many years, he once fell into a contemplation and was driven back upon himself, and a voice spoke within him thus: ‘Thou shouldst know that it is inner abandonment that leads men to the highest truth.’

Now this noble word was as yet strange and unknown to him, but he had great love for it, and he felt powerfully impelled towards this and similar things, wondering whether he could ever attain it before his death, whether he would be enabled to know it undisguised and to experience it to the full. Then it fell out that a warning came to him that, hidden beneath the brightness of this vision, there was concealed the deceptive abyss of inordinate liberty, wherein lurks great injury for Holy Christendom.⁴ Thereat he was afraid, and for a time he resisted the inner call within him.

But once he had an ecstasy, and it gave him strength. A ray from the Divine truth shone within him, revealing that he

¹ Psalm I, 8 (A.V. li, 6).

² Fasting and other bodily austerities.

³ I.e. abandonment of self, and surrender to God’s will.

⁴ A reference to the doctrines of the Brethren of the Free Spirit and the Beghards.

should not allow himself to be depressed on this score, since it had ever been thus, and must ever be so, that evil is hidden behind good, and therefore we should not reject the good on account of the evil. He was reminded that, in the Old Testament, when God did true signs through Moses, the magicians mixed their false ones among them;¹ and when Christ, the true Messiah, arose, there came others, who falsely claimed to be the Messiah.² And so it is everywhere in all things: that is why one should not reject the good with the bad, but one must sift things with careful discrimination, as the Divine mouth does.³ 'And, in the same way', said the voice within him, 'good and sensible visions of such men as have submitted their own clear reason to the judgment of Holy Church are not to be rejected.'⁴ Moreover, one need not fight shy of rational opinions which bear in them the wholesome truth that emerges from a perfect life. For they refine man and show him his natural nobility, the transcendence of the Divine Being and the nothingness of all other things, which fittingly draws all men more than everything else on the path of true abandonment.' And thus he returned to the former way of life to which he had been summoned, that is, the search for true abandonment.

So he asked Eternal Truth to explain to him clearly the difference, as far as it was possible, between those men who aim at well-regulated simplicity, and some who, it is said, aim at inordinate liberty or licence. He also asked to be instructed about the nature of true abandonment, by means of which he might come to the place where he ought to be.

Then he was answered in a brightly shining revelation that all this would be revealed to him in the form of an allegory, in which the disciple asked questions, and the Truth answered. And he was first directed to Holy Scripture, to the kernel through which Eternal Truth speaks. He was told to seek there, and observe what those most learned and experienced men said of these things, to whom God, as is said in Latin at

¹ Exodus vii, 10-12; 20-22.

² St. Matthew xxiv, 5, 11.

³ Jeremiah xv, 19.

⁴ Mystical revelation that is approved by traditional authority is contrasted with the aberrations of undisciplined individuals.

PROLOGUE

the beginning of this little book, has opened up His hidden wisdom, and what Holy Christendom has thought about it, so that he would be supported by firm truth. And from this source he was enlightened as now follows.

CHAPTER ONE

How a self-abandoned man begins and ends in unity

It is profitable for all men who desire to be brought back to God, to know the original source of themselves and of all things, for in Him is also their final goal.

As to this, one should know that all who ever spoke of the truth agree that there is a Something, which is absolutely the first and simplest of all things, and before it there was nothing. Now Dionysius¹ contemplated this unfathomable Being in its nakedness; he and other theologians say that this simplest thing remains unnamed in spite of all its names.² For, as it is said in the science of Logic,³ the name should express the nature and concept of the thing named. However, it is well known that the nature of the aforesaid simple Being is infinite, immeasurable, and not to be understood by any intelligence of the creatures.⁴ Thus, it is well known to all learned theologians that this incomprehensible Being is also nameless. Hence Dionysius, in *The Book of Divine Names*, says that God is a Non-being or Nothing; and this is to be understood as regards all the Essence and Being that we can attribute to Him as to a creature.⁵ For, whatever of these is ascribed to Him is all in one sense false, and the negation thereof is true. Hence, one might call this Being an eternal Nothing. Nevertheless, if one should speak of a thing, however unsurpassable and omnipotent it is, one must create for it some name or other. The essence of this serene simplicity is its life, and its life is its essence. It is a living, essential, subsisting intelligence, which understands itself, and

¹ Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite.

² *De Divinis Nominibus*, I, 4-6; VII, 3.

³ St. Thomas, *Summa Theologica*, I, qu. 13, a. 4.

⁴ Created beings, men.

⁵ *De Coelestiali Hierarchia*, II, 3.

CHAPTER ONE

exists itself in itself,¹ and it is itself. Now I cannot express it any more plainly. And I call it the eternal uncreated Truth, for in Him all things are, as it were, in their youthful freshness, in their prime source and eternal beginning.² And in Him begins and ends a self-abandoned man, in orderly contemplation, as is demonstrated below.

¹ It is self-sufficient.

² All things exist in God, as the eternal prototypes or ideas; see below, Chapter III.

CHAPTER TWO

Whether there can be any diversity in the highest unity

The Disciple asked and said: Since all this is so, and this One is so very simple,¹ whence comes the diversity that is ascribed to him? One person clothes Him with wisdom and calls Him 'Wisdom', another 'Goodness', another 'Justice', and so on. Thus do the theologians speak, from belief in the Holy Trinity.² But why does one not let Him remain in the simplicity which is Himself? I still think that this unique One has too many activities, too much other-ness. How can something be just a simple Unity, in which there is nevertheless such great multiplicity?

The TRUTH answered and said: All this diversity is fundamentally and basically one single unity.³

The DISCIPLE asked: What dost Thou call the fundamental and the basis, and what is not fundamental?

The answer of TRUTH: I call the basis the source and origin, from which the processions flow.

The DISCIPLE: Lord, what is that?

The TRUTH: It is the nature and essence of the Godhead: in this unfathomable abyss the Trinity of the Persons is engulfed in Their unity, and all multiplicity is in a certain manner lost to itself. Nor is there any alien activity therein, so to speak, but only a silent, hovering darkness.

The DISCIPLE spoke: Ah, dear Lord, tell me, what then is it that causes this Being to act, and especially with regard to its own peculiar act of begetting?⁴

The TRUTH spoke: That is its powerful force.

¹ St. Thomas, op. cit., I, qu. 3, art. 7.

² Which suggests a differentiation and diversity.

³ Cf. Franz Pfeiffer, *Deutsche Mystiker*, p. 181, lines 10-13; 144, 33-4; 632, 25-6, 2. Band, Leipzig, 1857.

⁴ Loc. cit., 181, 10-12.

The DISCIPLE: Lord, what is that?

The TRUTH: It is the Divine Nature in the Father, in whom it is fruitful to beget and work, for precisely at this time, according to our mode of intelligence, the Godhead has swung itself up to God.

The DISCIPLE: Lord, are they not one?

The TRUTH spoke: Yes, Godhead and God are all one, and yet the Godhead does not act or beget, but God acts and begets. And this is merely due to the difference in the terms, according to our mode of intelligence.¹ Basically, They² are one. For in the Divine Nature there is nothing but essence and reciprocal relations; and the latter add nothing at all to the essence; indeed they are the essence,³ although they are distinct from that to which they relate, that is, from their object. For the Divine Nature, considered in Its basic ground, is by no means simpler in Itself than the Father, considered in the same nature, or any other of the Persons. Thou allowest thyself to be merely deceived by thy imagination if thou dost consider all this in the manner in which it occurs in the creatures. But in itself it is one and simple.

The DISCIPLE said: I see quite well that I have come to the deepest ground of the sublimest simplicity, beyond which no one can pass, if he allows himself to be led by the Truth.

¹ Our reason distinguishes between Godhead and God, but this is a purely intellectual distinction, and is due to our limited powers of knowledge.

² Godhead and God.

³ Thomas Aquinas, *op. cit.*, I, qu. 29, a. 4; qu. 28, a. 3.

CHAPTER THREE

How man and all creatures have eternally existed, and how they proceed from this state as creatures

The DISCIPLE: Eternal Wisdom, how then have the creatures eternally existed in God?

Answer: They have been in Him as their eternal exemplar.¹

The DISCIPLE: What is that, 'exemplar'?

The TRUTH: It is His eternal essence, in the sense in which it is communicated to the creatures, in order that they may participate in it. Note, however, that all creatures exist eternally as God in God, and are not distinguished in Him essentially, except in the sense already mentioned. They are the same life, essence and power, so far as they are in God, and are the same One and nothing less. But after the issuing forth, through which they receive their own being, every creature has its own special separate essence, its own form, which gives it its natural being, because form gives essence,² separate and divided, both from the Divine essence and from all others.³ Thus, the natural form of the stone causes it to have its own being, for the stone is not God, and God is not the stone, although the stone and all creatures are what they are through Him. And in this issuing forth all creatures have attained their God, for when the creature finds itself to be a creature, it acknowledges its Creator and God.

The DISCIPLE: Dear Lord, is the being of creatures nobler when it is in God, or when it is in itself?

The TRUTH: The being of the creatures in God is not that of

¹ St. Thomas, op. cit., I, qu. 44, a. 3.

² The phraseology here is Augustinian rather than Thomist; one suspects Eckhart's influence.

³ St. Thomas, op. cit., I, qu. 42, a. 1, ad. 1.

CHAPTER THREE

a creature, but the creatureliness of every creature is nobler for it (the creature), and more useful, than the being it has in God. For what advantage has a stone or a man or any creature in its status as a creature, from the fact that it has been eternally in God? God has ordered things well and rightly, for everything must needs look back to its first origin in submission.

The DISCIPLE: Ah, Lord, whence then come sin, wickedness, hell, purgatory, devils, and the like?

Reply: Although the rational creature should die to itself and look back towards the One, it nevertheless remains turned towards the outside world, with a false attachment to its own self; thence proceed the devil and all evil.

CHAPTER FOUR

Of the true return which a self-abandoned man should make through the only-begotten Son

The DISCIPLE: I have well understood the truth of the creation and issuing forth of the creatures. Now I should also like to hear of the break-through,¹ and how man through Christ can return and attain his blessedness.

The TRUTH: Know that Christ, the Son of God, has something in common with all men and something particular, over and above what all men have. What He has in common with all men is human nature: for He was also truly man. He only assumed human nature and not human personality: that is to be understood to mean that Christ took human nature in the indivisibility of the substance,² which John of Damascus calls 'in atomo'.³ And thus, to the common human nature He adopted, corresponds the pure blood in the blessed body of Mary, from which He received the physical instrument.⁴ And hence human nature, of itself, has no right to claim that, just because Christ adopted it and not human personality, everyone should or could for this reason be God and man in the same manner as He was. It is He alone to whom belongs this unique and incomprehensible dignity: He assumed our nature in such purity that nothing of original sin, or of any other sin, remained in Him, and hence it was He alone who could redeem the sinful human race.

Secondly, the meritorious works of all other men, which

¹ The return to God. One of Suso's favourite phrases.

² He assumed an individual human nature.

³ *De Fide Orthodoxa*, III, ii, 11.

⁴ His body.

they do in true abandonment of themselves, really lead men to the blessedness which is the reward of virtue. And this blessedness consists in full Divine fruition, in which all obstacles and otherness have been cast off. But the union of the incarnation of Christ, since it takes place in a personal being, surpasses it, and is higher than the union of the souls of the blessed with God. For, from the first moment when He was conceived as man, He was truly the Son of God, so that He had no other personality than that of the Son of God. But all other men have their natural personality in their natural being; and however completely they are lost to themselves, or however fully they abandon themselves to the truth, it does not occur that they are ever transformed into the personality of the Divine Person, and lose their own personality.¹

Thirdly, this man, Christ, has also this above all other men: He is the head of the Church,² just as the head of man is in relation to his body, for it is written that all those whom He has foreknown, He has elected, that they may be conformed to the image of the Son of God, that they may be the first-born among many others.³ And therefore, he who would truly return and become a son with Christ, should turn with true self-abandonment from himself to Him, and then he will come to the place to which he should go.

The DISCIPLE: Lord, what is true self-abandonment?

The TRUTH: Grasp the important distinction of these two words; 'self-abandonment'; and if thou canst carefully consider these two words, and penetrate their ultimate meaning to the full, and consider it with true insight, thou canst swiftly learn the truth.

Now first consider the first word, which is 'self', and see what it means. Know that every man has five kinds of self. One he has in common with a stone, and that is being; the second with a plant, and that is growth; the third with the animals, that is feeling; the fourth with all men, that is, that he has in him a common human nature, in which all others are one; the

¹ Suso is guarding against pantheism here.

² Ephesians i, 22-3.

³ Romans viii, 29.

fifth, which properly belongs to him, is his personality, both according to the nobler part and to the accidents.¹

What is it that leads a man astray, and deprives him of his blessedness? That is only his last self, in which man turns away from God and towards himself, whereas he ought to return to Him; and he makes himself in his thoughtlessness a self of his own. That is to say, in his blindness he appropriates to himself what is God's,² makes this his aim, and sooner or later falls into sin.

But he who would abandon this self in a fitting manner, should cast three glances within. First, he should turn with a look that sinks away towards the nothingness of his own self, considering that this self and that of all things is nothing, left out and shut out from the Something, which is the only acting force.

The second look, which is not to be neglected, is that in the highest abandonment one's self always retains its own active essence after the return,³ and that there it is not destroyed at the same time.⁴ The third look takes place with the destruction and free surrender of one's self in all the things to which it had ever been led in its state as a wild creature in unfree multiplicity,⁵ against the Divine truth, in joy or sorrow, in action or inaction. This takes place in such a way that he is lost absolutely in the richness of power, dying irrevocably to himself, and becoming one with Christ in eternity, so that at all times he acts in Him, receiving all things and contemplating all things in this simplicity.

And this surrendered self becomes a Christ-like self, as the Scriptures say of Paul, who says: 'I live, but not I, Christ liveth in me.'⁶ And I call this a well-balanced self.

Now let us take the second word that He says,⁷ namely

¹ Both soul and body. See Franz Pfeiffer, *Deutsche Mystiker*, 2 Band, p. 158, 12-13, Leipzig, 1857.

² Makes himself his own god, or an object of worship.

³ To consciousness (after an ecstasy).

⁴ Here again, Suso rules out a pantheistic explanation.

⁵ Entanglement with the complications of the world.

⁶ Galatians ii, 20; cf. 1 Corinthians xv, 10.

⁷ Probably a reference to St. Matthew xvi, 24.

'abandonment'. That means 'forsaking', or 'despising'; not that one can forsake this self so that it becomes nothing at all, save in our contempt of it. It is well with him who does this.

The DISCIPLE: Praised be the truth! Dear Lord, tell me, does anything at all remain to a blessed, self-abandoned man?

The TRUTH: It happens, no doubt, that, when the good and faithful servant enters into the joy of his Lord,¹ he becomes intoxicated with the immeasurable abundance of the Divine house.² For in an ineffable manner, it happens to him as to a drunk man, who forgets himself, is no longer himself. He is quite dead to himself, and is entirely lost in God, has passed into Him, and has become one spirit with Him in all respects,³ just as a little drop of water that is poured into a large quantity of wine. For, as this is lost to itself, and draws to itself and into itself the taste and colour of the wine, similarly it happens to those who are in the full possession of blessedness. In an inexpressible manner all human desires fall away from them, they melt away into themselves, and sink away completely into the will of God. If anything remained in man, and was not entirely poured out of him, then the Scripture could not be true that says: God is to become all things to all things.⁴ Nevertheless, his being remains, though in a different form, in a different glory, and in a different power. And all this comes to a man through his utter abandonment of self.

He⁵ adds on the same topic: 'But whether a man can ever be so self-abandoned in this life that he completely grasps this, and no longer, either in joy or sorrow, considers his own selfhood, but only loves and seeks himself with the most perfect understanding for the sake of God, I cannot see,' says the master,⁶ 'whether it is so. May those who have experienced it, come forward, for, as far as I can understand, it does not seem possible to me.'

¹ St. Matthew xxv, 23.

² Psalm xxxv, 9 (A.V. xxxvi, 8).

³ 1 Corinthians vi, 17.

⁴ 1 Corinthians xv, 28.

⁵ St. Bernard, *De Diligendo Deo*, 15 n. 39.

⁶ St. Bernard.

From all these words thou canst find the answer to thy question, for the true self-abandonment of such a noble-minded man in the world is formed and shaped after the self-abandonment of the blessed, of whom the Scriptures speak, and is more or less similar to it, according to the extent to which men are more or less united with God, and have become one with Him. And note particularly what he says, that they are then deprived of their own being and transformed into another form, another glory, and another power.

Now, what else is this other strange form but the Divine Nature and the Divine Essence, into which they flow and which flows into them, in order to be one with Him? And what else is this glory than to be transfigured and glorified in the light of being, which no man can approach unto?¹ What else, then, is this other power, than that the Divine strength and Divine power is given to man through this personality and this union, to do and leave undone all that belongs to his blessedness? And thus man is dehumanized, as has been said.

The DISCIPLE: Lord, is it possible in this world?

The TRUTH: The blessedness that is being discussed can be obtained in two ways: one method aims at the most perfect degree, which transcends all possibility, and cannot be attained in this world, for the body is included in the nature of man, and its manifold tribulations stand in the way of this. But blessedness in the sense of participated union is quite possible, although to many men it seems impossible, and not without cause, for neither mind nor reason can attain to it. A theological work² says that there is indeed one kind of men, chosen and well-trying, who are of such a fully purified and godlike mind that virtues blossom forth in them, as in God, for they are transformed and over-formed in the unity of their first exemplar. They come, in some measure, to full forgetfulness of this transient and temporal life; they are transformed into the image of God, and are one with Him. But, at the same time, all this holds good only for those who have possessed this blessedness

¹ 1 Timothy vi, 16.

² St. Thomas, *Summa Theologica*, I, qu. 61, a. 5.

CHAPTER FOUR

in the highest degree,¹ or on the other hand, for some men and only few, and the most pious of all, who are still in their bodies living in this world.

¹ In Heaven.

CHAPTER FIVE

Of the sublime and fruitful answers that the Truth granted him through the vision of a self-abandoned man

After this there came over the Disciple a desire to know whether in any country there lived a self-abandoned man so noble that he had been rapt into God through Christ. If so, he asked God to help him to become acquainted with this man, that he might have confidential converse with him. Once, when his heart was full of longing, he began to sink into himself, his senses were dimmed, and it seemed to him that he was transported to a spiritual land. There he saw in mid-air an image, benign of aspect, hovering over a cross, as if it were the image of a man. There were two kinds of men thronging round this image, but they could not reach it. One kind of them contemplated the image only from within, and not from without, the others only from without, and not from within; but both faced the image, as if in opposition and obduracy. Then it seemed to him that the image came down to the ground like a real man, sat down beside him, and said that if he asked what he wanted to know, his questions would be answered.

He began speaking and sighing from the depths of his heart: 'Ah, Eternal Truth, what is it, and what does this wonderful vision mean?' Then the answer came, and a voice spoke within him thus: 'This image which thou hast seen, means the only-begotten Son of God, in the form in which He received human nature. Thou sawest only one image, and yet the image was endlessly diversified: this signifies the men who are His limbs, and are like the many members of a body. His head shone thus transcendent: this meant that He is the first and only-begotten Son, in accordance with the all-surpassing glory of being taken

up into the self-hood of the Divine Person,¹ but the others are only taken up into the transcendent unity of this image.² The cross means that a truly self-abandoned man, in his outer and inner man, must at all times continue to be resigned to everything that God wills that he should suffer, from whatever direction it comes, so that he may be bowed down as in death, to accept it all to the glory of the heavenly Father. And such men are inwardly ennobled and outwardly armed.

If the image near the cross was so benign, that denotes that they despise all their sufferings, however great they may be, because of their own self-abandonment. In whatever way or direction the head turned, the body turned also: this signifies the uniformity with which they faithfully follow the mirror of His pure life and His good doctrine, towards which they vigorously turn, and to which they conform themselves.

The first kind of men, who look at Him from within and not from without, denote those persons who only consider Christ's life intellectually, who are only contemplative, not active, whereas they should break through their own natures and practise the imitation of this image. They drag down everything the image suggests to the lusts of their own nature, and to reinforce their inordinate freedom, and everyone who does not agree with them in this seems to them to be coarse and unintelligent.³

Some men, on the other hand, consider the image only from without, and not from within, and they seem⁴ to be hard and strict; moreover, they also exercise themselves severely, live carefully and display before men an honourable, holy exterior, but they overlook the inner Christ. Although His life was gentle and meek, these men are very quarrelsome; they condemn others, and everyone who does not live their way seems to them to be in error. The conduct of these persons is not like the life of Him whom they claim to follow, and this is to be seen in the fact that, if one observes them, they do not persevere

¹ Cf. St. Thomas, *Summa Theologica*, III, qu. 4, a. 2; qu. 23, a. 4.

² Cf. II Corinthians iii, 18.

³ These are the false mystics who pervert their experiences to their own sinful ends, see above, pp. 18-9, 173.

⁴ I follow here MS. N, which has the plural. Bihlmeyer has the singular *schein* (seemed).

in self-abandonment, in dying to their own natures, and moreover in giving up those desires, such as likes or dislikes, and so forth, which strengthen self-will. Hence, their self-will is retained and increased, so that they do not attain the Divine virtues, such as obedience, patience in suffering, renunciation, and so on, which virtues, after all, lead men to the image of Christ.

The DISCIPLE asked again forthwith, and said: Tell me, what dost thou call the manner in which a man attains his blessedness?

Answer: It may be called a birth, as it is written in Saint John's Gospel,¹ that He gave also might and power to all who were born of nothing else than God, to become children of God. And that takes place in the same way as birth is understood in common or general language. For that which gives birth to something else, forms it according to itself and in itself, and gives it a similar essence and activity. Therefore, the eyes of a self-abandoned man, whose Father is God alone, and in whom nothing temporal is born of the flesh, are opened, so that he understands himself, and then he receives His precious essence and life, and is one with Him, for all things are one in the One.

The DISCIPLE said: Yet I see that there are mountains and valleys, and water and air, and all kinds of created things: how then canst Thou say that there is but One?

The pure Word answered and said thus: I will tell thee more: unless man can understand two contraries, that is, two contradictory things, together, then truly and without any doubt it is not easy to speak to him of such things. For, until he understands this, he has not yet started out on the path of the life that I am talking about.

Question: What are these contraries?

Answer: An eternal Nothing and the creation in time.²

Question: Two contraries in one are in every respect a negation of all knowledge.

Answer: I and thou do not meet on one branch or at one

¹ i, 12-13.

² God is eternal, but He is also revealed in the universe which exists in time.

place:¹ thou goest one way, and I another. Thy questions proceed from human reason, and I reply from the reason that is above human understanding. Thou must become ignorant if thou wouldst attain it, for by ignorance the truth is known.²

At this time a great change took place in him. It happened occasionally, in the course of ten weeks, more or less, that he was so powerfully rapt away that either in the presence of others, or when alone, his senses used to fade away, and ceased to perform their functions, so that everywhere in all things only One replied to him and all things were in One, without any diversity of this or that.

The Word began and spoke to him: How now, how are things now? Was I right?

He said: Yes, what I could not believe before, has now become knowledge in me. But I wonder why it always dies away.

The Word said: That is perhaps because it has not yet sunk down to its real ground.

The Disciple began and asked thus: What is the goal of the intelligence of a self-abandoned man?

Answer: A man may in this life reach the point at which he understands himself to be one with that which is nothing as compared with all the things that one can imagine or express in words. By common agreement, men call this Nothing 'God', and it is itself a most essential Something. And here man knows himself to be one with this Nothing, and this Nothing knows itself without the action of the intellect.³ But there is something more deeply hidden in Him.

Question: Do the Scriptures⁴ say anything of that which thou hast called 'Nothing'? Not of its non-being, but of its surpassing incomprehensibility?

Answer: Dionysius⁵ speaks of One, who is nameless, and this may be the Nothing that I mean. For if anyone calls Him 'God-head', or 'Being', or whatever name one gives Him, they are

¹ We do not agree.

² St. Augustine, *De Ordine*, ii, 16, n. 44.

³ In pure contemplation.

⁴ Meaning not merely the Bible, but also the Liturgy, the Fathers, and so on.

⁵ *De Divinis Nominibus*, i, 4-6; vii, 3.

not appropriate to Him in the sense in which these names are applied to the creatures.

Question: What is that which is more deeply hidden in the aforesaid Nothing, which in its meaning, according to thy opinion, excludes all created being? It is, after all, pure simplicity. How can that which is the most simple have a 'within' or 'without'?

Answer: As long as one understands thereby a unity, or such a thing as can be explained by words, one has to go farther inwards. The Nothing, however, cannot penetrate deeper into itself, but we can, as far as our understanding allows, that is, when we are able to understand without the light of forms or images of any kind the things which, indeed, no intelligence that operates by means of forms or images can attain.¹ And one cannot speak of it, I mean as of a thing that can be described in words. But whatever can be said of the Nothing by no means explains what it is, although there were as many doctors and books again. But it is also true that this Nothing is intelligence or essence or fruition, in the sense in which one can speak of it to us. But in point of fact, it is as far and farther from the Nothing as it would be to say 'chopping-block' instead of 'fine pearl'.

Question: What does this mean: when the creative Nothing that is called God, comes into itself, man knows no difference between himself and it?

Answer: This Nothing is not in itself for us, as long as it is working such things in us. But if it comes into itself for us, we know nothing of these things, nor does it for us.

Question: Explain this more fully to me.

Answer: Dost thou not understand that the powerful transport into the Nothing casts out all difference in the ground,² not according to our essence,³ but according to our perception, as has been said?

Question: A word that was said previously still puzzles me: that man can in this world attain the state in which he under-

¹ By means of our intellect we can progress in our knowledge of God, but this knowledge by means of images is incomplete. Fuller knowledge can only come by union with God. See below, p. 195, n.2.

² Of God.

³ The essences are distinct; it is an intellectual union of wills.

stands himself to be one with that which has ever been. How is that possible?

Answer: A master¹ says that eternity is a life which is above time, and includes all time in itself, without any 'before' or 'after', and whoever is carried up into the eternal Nothing possesses all in all, and therein he has neither 'before' nor 'after'. Indeed a man rapt up to-day would not have been there for a shorter time, speaking in terms of eternity, than he who was taken up a thousand years ago.

An Objection: Man only expects this rapture after death, as the Scriptures say.

Answer: That is true, as regards an enduring and perfect possession, but not as regards a foretaste, more or less.

Question: What of the co-operation of man with God?

Answer: What is said of this is not to be taken according to the sense of the words in ordinary speech; it is to be taken in terms of the ecstasy, in which man has not remained to himself, but has passed into the One, and has become one, and in that state man does not act as man. In this way it is to be understood that this man has in himself all creatures in unity, and all pleasure, even that which one has in physical actions, without any physical or intellectual activity, for he is himself in the aforesaid union.

Note here a difference. The old natural masters² studied natural things only as regards their natural causes, and they discussed them also from this aspect; they understood and examined them thus, and not otherwise. But the Christian theologians, and the doctors and saintly people in general, take things as proceeding from God, and as bringing back man after his natural death, while they live here according to His will. But these men who are rapt into eternity, consider themselves and all things for ever as everlasting and eternal, because of their surpassing indwelling unity.

Question: Is there no otherness there?³

¹ Cf. Boethius, *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, V, 6.

² The philosophers, especially Aristotle.

³ No sense of separate existence on the part of the man who is 'rapt into eternity.'

Answer: Yes, he has it more than ever who knows it, and recognizes himself as a creature, not as sinful, but as united. And when he was not, he was the same, but not united.

Question: What does that mean: When he was not, he was the same?

Answer: That is what Saint John says in his Gospel: Everything that was made, or created, was life in Him.¹

Question: How can this be upheld as true? For it sounds as if the soul were two things, created and uncreated. How can this be? How can man be a creature,² and yet not a creature?

Answer: Man cannot be both a creature and God, in our parlance. God is both three and one. In the same way, man can, in some measure, if he is rapt into God, be one in losing himself, and yet externally be enjoying, contemplating, and so on. And I will give an analogy. The eye loses itself when engaged in seeing, for in the act of vision it becomes one with its object, and yet remains what it is.

Questions: Anyone who has ever known the Scriptures³ is aware that in the Nothing the soul must either be transformed, or on the other hand it must be annihilated in its own essence, and that is not so here.

Answer: The soul always remains a creature, but in the Nothing in which it is lost, it does not consider at all in what way it is then a creature, or what the Nothing is, or whether it is a creature or not, or whether it is united or not. But when one is able to reflect, one understands this, and it remains in us unimpaired.⁴

Question: Has such a man attained the highest?

Answer: Yes, in the measure in which that which he has is not taken away from him, and something else, something better,

¹ Many of the Fathers, in particular St. Augustine, and the Scholastics, drew the end of verse 3 in chapter 1 to verse 4, and quoted it in support of their doctrine of ideas.

² I.e. a created being.

³ See above, p. 191, n. 4.

⁴ In the mystic union the soul does not reflect on itself, but after returning to ordinary consciousness, it is aware of its own separate existence as a creature, and of the threefold nature of God.

is given him. He comes to understand it more and more purely, and it remains in him. But nevertheless, he cannot live up to all this after the return. If he is to attain this, he must be in the ground which is hidden in the aforesaid Nothing. There one knows nothing, there is nothing there, nor is there any place there. Whatever one says of it is a mere mockery. Then man is indeed nothing, as has been said above.

Question: Explain this to me more fully.

Answer: The doctors say that the blessedness of the soul depends above all on this: if it contemplates the naked Godhead, it takes all its life and being, and draws all that it is, so far as it is blessed, from the ground of the Nothing, and, speaking in terms of this contemplation, knows nothing of knowledge, or of love, or of anything whatever. It is entirely and absolutely passive in the Nothing, and knows nothing but being, which is God, or the Nothing. But when it knows and recognizes that it is aware of the Nothing, that it contemplates and knows it, that is a return and a reversion from this highest stage to itself, according to the natural order. And as this rapture has penetrated out of the same deepest veins, thou canst understand what it is like fundamentally.

Question: I should like to know it better from the truths of the Scriptures.

Answer: The theologians¹ say: If one knows the creature in itself, that is called 'evening knowledge', for in this way one sees the creatures in images with some distinctions, but if one knows the creatures in God, this is called 'morning knowledge', and then one sees the creatures without any distinction, freed from all images and all likeness, in the One, who is God Himself.

Question: Can man understand this Nothing in this life?

Answer: According to the way of the intellect,² I do not understand how this could be. But in the state of union, he knows himself to be united with that in which this Nothing

¹ St. Augustine, *De Genesi ad Literam*, c. 22, no. 39 sqq.

² By means of intellectual processes it is impossible; contemplation is a higher faculty.

enjoys and begets. This may well be when the body is on earth, in ordinary parlance, but then man is beyond time.¹

Question: Does this union of the soul take place with the essence of the soul, or with its powers?²

Answer: The essence of the soul is united with the essence of the Nothing,³ and the powers of the soul with the activity of the Nothing; the Nothing has the works in itself.⁴

Question: Do the sins of a man also fall away from him, or could he afterwards commit no sin, when he recognizes himself to be still a creature, not in a sinful way, but in the way of union?

Answer: In so far as man remains in himself, he can fall into sin, as Saint John says: 'If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.'⁵ But in so far as he does not remain in himself, he does not commit sin, as Saint John says in his *Epistle*,⁶ that the man who is born of God does not sin, nor err, for the Divine seed remains in him. Hence the man who is fortunate to attain this never performs more than one work, for there is only one birth and one ground, and that is the union.

An Objection: How can it be that man does not perform more than one work? For Christ performed two kinds of works.

Answer: I consider that a man does not do more than one work, who considers no works, save only when the Divine birth works it. If Almighty God did not beget His Son without intermission, Christ would never have done natural works. Therefore, I only consider it as one work, unless one takes it according to human understanding.

An Objection: And yet the heathen masters say that nothing can be deprived of its own activity.⁷

¹ Rapt into eternity.

² Cf. Franz Pfeiffer, *Deutsche Mystiker*, 2 Band, p. 525, 24 sqq., Leipzig, 1857.

³ This statement can scarcely be reconciled with others in this work, e.g. supra, p. 192, n. 3.

⁴ God, and not man, works in the mystic union.

⁵ 1 St. John i, 8.

⁶ 1 St. John iii, 9.

⁷ Aristotle, *De Caelo*, 286, a. 9.

Answer: Man is not deprived of his own activity; it remains present, but he is not conscious of it.¹

Question: The creaturely works which remain to man to perform, does he do them, or, if not, who does?

Answer: If man is to come to the above state,² he must be dead to the rebirth that is in him, and yet this rebirth must be attained. Notice how: all that comes into us, from whatever source, is of no use to us, unless it is born again in us. This rebirth is so strange, and has so little to do with the body, once it has taken place, that nature then works in man, as in a rational animal, such works as belong to the life of man. Man has, so to speak, nothing more to do, that is, in an active way, that he had before his regeneration, but he performs these works in a habitual manner. To take a comparison from the distillation of wine: it has no less the matter for powerful and quiet action than the wine that stayed in its original state.

Question: Make a distinction between the eternal birth and the rebirth that takes place in natural man.

Answer: I call 'eternal regeneration' the only force to which all things and the causes of all things owe the fact that they are, and that they are causes. But the regeneration that belongs to man alone, I call a sinking back of everything towards its origin, without any consideration of itself.³

An Objection: What then do the essential causes do, of which the natural masters⁴ write?

Answer: They naturally bring about everything that the eternal rebirth works in man in his regeneration; but nothing can be said as to what goes on in the ground.

Question: When the soul dies away in this rapture, as regards knowledge and all the activities of a creature, what is it that remains to see to external things?

Answer: All the powers of the soul are too weak to be united with the Nothing in such a manner as is described above; but

¹ The activity of the powers of the soul does not cease in the highest contemplation, but reflection about it ceases.

² The mystic union.

³ Suso distinguishes a purely natural regeneration, which man has in common with animals, and a supernatural one.

⁴ See above, p. 193, n. 2.

nevertheless, when one has lost oneself in the Nothing, the forces work that which is their origin.

Question: Of what nature is the losing of oneself, when man loses himself in God?

Answer: If thou hast heeded me aright, it has been fully and properly shown thee. For when a man is thus taken out of himself, so that he neither knows anything about himself, nor about anything else, and above all, is made calm in the ground of the eternal Nothing, then he is really lost to himself.

Question: Does the will fade out in the eternal Nothing?

Answer: Yes, as regards its own will. For, free as the will is, it is only truly free when it no longer needs to will.

An Objection: How can a man's will fade away? Christ, the Lord, retained His will, from the point of view of volition.

Answer: A man's will fades away as regards volition, in the sense of wanting to do this or that from self-will. He has no activity of such a will in this sinful sense, as has been said already. But his will has become free, so that he does not perform more than one work,¹ which is himself from the point of view of union, and which he does outside time.² Moreover, to put it in our ordinary manner of speech, he cannot want to do any evil, and wants to do every good deed. But really his life and will and activity are a quiet, untouched freedom, which is certainly, beyond all doubt, his support. And then he acts by the method of creation.

An Objection: The issuing forth of the will does not take place by the method of creation.

Answer: The will is united with the Divine will, and wants nothing but what it is itself,³ as far as the will is in God. And as was said previously, this is not to be understood as an irruption of one's self into God, as it is commonly understood. It is to be taken as a dying to oneself, for man is so completely united with God that God is his ground.

Question: Does man retain his personal, individual being in the ground of the Nothing?

¹ He only performs God's will.

² In eternity.

³ He works the works of God.

Answer: This is altogether to be understood only in the sense in which men understand it, according to which in the transcendent vision of the Godhead, man does not consider this or that. It is not to be taken to mean according to the essence, in which every being remains what it is,¹ as Saint Augustine well says: 'Let this and that good fall into contempt, then the pure Goodness remains, hovering in its pure essence, and that is God.'²

Question: And when a man understands this Nothing, of which we have spoken, and enjoys it habitually, does this always remain with him?

Answer: No, not in the sense of enjoying it actually, but it remains in a habitual way, never to be lost.

Question: Or does the outer disturb the inner at all?

Answer: If we were outside of time, according to the body, there would in some sense be fewer disturbances, such as hunger, toil, and other things. But the outer spiritual contemplation does not disturb the inner, since the latter is in liberty. Yet it also happens at times that, the more nature is suppressed, the more abundantly Divine truth is revealed.

Question: Whence comes dejection?

Answer: When such a thing comes from none but natural causes, and a man is inwardly free, he should not heed it, for it will disappear with the body. But if the inner man should be deeply involved in it, he would be in a bad state.

An Objection: The Scriptures of the Old Testament and the New, in the Gospels, enlighten us that one cannot attain in this life that which has been mentioned.

Answer: That is true, as regards the possession and full knowledge of it, for what man attempts here is much more perfect hereafter; although it is the same thing, it may well be beyond our comprehension here on earth.

Question: A man who begins to understand his eternal nothingness, not by virtue of Divine strength, but only from hearsay, or even without it, by means of images from outside, what is he to do?

¹ The essence (or essential nature) of man is not united with the essence of God.

² *De Trinitate*, viii, 3 n. 4.

Answer: The man who does not yet understand enough to know supernaturally what the aforesaid Nothing is, in which all things are annihilated internally as to their own selfhood, he should let all things be as they are, whatever happens to him, and hold to the common teaching of holy Christendom, as one sees many simple, good men doing, who aim at praiseworthy sanctity; who, however, have not yet been called thereto.¹ But the nearer, the better. If anyone has reached the safe point, let him hold to it; he is on the right way, for the point accords with Holy Writ. Otherwise, methinks one should be cautious, for if anyone wastes his strength, he either relapses into intolerable depression, or he often falls into inordinate liberty.

¹ Our own efforts do not suffice, only by grace can we achieve the mystic experience.

CHAPTER SIX

*In what points those men are found wanting who have
false freedom¹*

Once, on a bright Sunday morning he sat withdrawn within himself and in meditation, and in the stillness of his mind he saw in a vision a being that was subtle in his words, but unskilled in his works, and who abounded in rhetorical verbiage.

He began and spoke to him thus: Whence comest thou?

He said: From nowhere.

He said: Tell me, what art thou?

He said: I am nothing.

He said: What dost thou want?

He answered: I want nothing.

He said again: This is strange. Tell me, what is thy name?

He said: I am called 'the nameless Wild Man'.²

The DISCIPLE said: Thou mayst well be called 'the Wild Man', for thy words and answers are wild indeed. Now tell me what I ask thee, whither does thy wisdom lead?

He said: To complete liberty.

The DISCIPLE said: Tell me, what dost thou call complete liberty?

He said: When a man lives according to his own choice, without opposition, without any look before or after.

The DISCIPLE said: Thou art not on the right road to truth, for such liberty leads a man away from all blessedness and robs him of true liberty, for he who lacks discretion, lacks discipline and what is without true discipline is evil and is deficient, as Christ said: 'He who sins is a slave of sin.'³ But he who with a

¹ In this chapter Suso is attacking the Beghards and Brethren of the Free Spirit.

² Literally: 'the nameless Wildness'.

³ St. John, viii, 34.

pure conscience and well-ordered life comes to Christ with true self-abandonment, attains true freedom, as He himself said: 'If the Son redeems you, ye are truly free.'¹

The WILD MAN said: What dost thou call disciplined, and what is undisciplined?

The DISCIPLE said: I call it disciplined if everything that pertains to a matter, either within or without, is not put aside unheeded in one's actions.² On the other hand I call it undisciplined if any of the aforesaid is omitted in these circumstances.

The WILD MAN said: Unrestrained liberty should die to all this, and despise it all.

The DISCIPLE said: This heedlessness would be contrary to all truth and is like false liberty, for it is opposed to the order, which the eternal Nothing in His creative power has given to all things.

The WILD MAN said: The man who has been annihilated in his eternal nothing knows nothing of distinctions.

The DISCIPLE: The eternal Nothing that is meant here, and in all true reasoning, is nothing, not because it does not exist, but because of its transcendent actuality. This 'Nothing' has in itself no distinctions at all, yet from Him, since He generates, come all the ordered distinctions of all things. Man is never so completely annihilated in this Nothing, but that his reason remembers the distinction of his origin, and his reason retains its free will, although all this is unheeded in his first ground.³

The WILD MAN: But if one just takes it nowhere else than in this ground and from this ground?

The DISCIPLE: That would be wrong, for there is, not only in the ground, but also in oneself something created outside the ground, and this remains what it is, and must be considered as such. If man were to lose his difference according to the essence, as well as in our perception, this statement might stand. But as has been said already, this is not so. In this respect one should always make a careful distinction.

¹ St. John viii, 35.

² If the deeds correspond to the doctrines.

³ In the union with God, who is his primal source.

The WILD MAN: I have heard that there was a sublime master,¹ and that he denied all distinctions.²

The DISCIPLE: If thou meanest that he denied all distinctions, if thou takest it in the Godhead, one might understand it as meaning the difference between the Persons in the ground,³ where they are without distinction, but not in respect to their relations, for in this we must certainly believe in a distinction between the Persons. But if thou dost understand it of a man rapt in ecstasy, enough has been already said to show that it is to be understood of our perception, not of the essence. And note this: separation and distinction are two quite different things. It is well known that body and soul have no separateness, for one is in the other, and no member of the body can live that is separated from the soul. But the soul is different from the body; for the soul is not the body, nor the body the soul. I understand it thus: in truth there is nothing that can be separated from the simple Being, because He gives being to all beings, but there is a distinction in the sense that the Divine Being is not the being of a stone, nor is the being of a stone the Divine Being, and no creature is identical with another. Hence the theologians maintain that, properly speaking, this distinction is not in God, but from God. And he⁴ speaks concerning the Book of Wisdom:⁵ 'Just as there is nothing more inward than God, in the same way there is nothing more distinct.' And therefore, thy interpretation is false, and this opinion is true.⁶

The WILD MAN said: The same master spoke very beautifully about the Christlike man.⁷

The DISCIPLE: The master says in one place: Christ is the only-begotten Son, and we are not. He is the Son by nature, for His birth takes place in nature. But we men are not the natural Son and our begetting is called a rebirth, because it takes place

¹ Eckhart.

² Between man and God in the mystic union.

³ The substance.

⁴ Eckhart.

⁵ Denifle, *Archiv für die Literatur und Kirchengeschichte des Mittelalters*, II, 498; cf. Pfeiffer, loc. cit., 163, 3 sqq.

⁶ Suso's.

⁷ This was the twentieth of the Condemned Propositions of Eckhart, v. Denifle, loc. cit., 572 sqq; Pfeiffer, p. 189.

in conformity with its nature. He is the image of the Father, we are formed in the image of the Holy Trinity. And he¹ says that in this respect no one can be equal to Him.

The WILD MAN: I have heard that the master says that such a man can do everything that Christ does.²

The DISCIPLE: The master says in one passage: 'The just man does everything that justice does.' And this is true, he says, where the just man is born of justice, as it is written: 'What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the spirit, is spirit.'³ For Christ has no being save the being of the Father, nor any begetter save the heavenly Father, and therefore He did everything that the heavenly Father does. But in all other men, he says, that is lacking, so that we work more or less with Him, according as we are more or less born of Him. And these words really reveal the truth to thee.

The WILD MAN: His words teach us that everything that is given to Christ is also given to me.⁴

The DISCIPLE: Everything that was given to Christ means the complete possession of real blessedness, as He Himself said: 'The Father has given me all things.'⁵ And He gave us all this, but in an unequal measure. And he¹ says in many places that He has all this by means of the incarnation, but we have it by union with God. Therefore He has all this the more nobly, as He was the more nobly receptive of it.

The Wild Man objected, however, and said that he⁶ denied all equality and unification,⁷ and put us naked and deprived of all difference into the naked unity.

The DISCIPLE answered and said: Thou art undoubtedly led astray, since the distinction which was previously mentioned is not clear to thee, namely how a man can be one with Christ and yet separate, and where he is united, and where he is to be

¹ Eckhart.

² Denifle, loc. cit., 508, n.

³ St. John iii, 6.

⁴ Eleventh Condemned Proposition from Eckhart's works; cf. Pfeiffer, loc. cit., 56, 18 sqq.

⁵ St. John xiii, 3.; St. Matthew xi, 17; xxviii, 18.

⁶ Eckhart.

⁷ He denied that man was on an equality with God, or that they were united, and said that God and man were simply one.

taken as one. The light has not yet illumined thee, for the true light that permits order and distinction, leads us away from discursive multiplicity. Thy sharp mind shines with the glow of the natural light in skilful reasoning, which seems very much like the light of Divine truth.

The Wild Man was silent, and asked him with respectful submission to explain to him more fully this valuable distinction.

He answered and said: The greatest failing that leads astray thee and those like thee, consists in this: you lack the proper distinctions of rational truth. Hence, he who wishes to achieve the highest goal, and not to fall into error, should daily study this hidden doctrine, then he will attain without hindrance to a blessed life.

CHAPTER SEVEN

How nobly a truly self-abandoned man bears himself in all things

After this, the Disciple turned earnestly to the Eternal Truth, and asked for some explanation of the characteristics of the outer appearance of a man who has truly abandoned himself, and he asked: Eternal Truth, how does such a man bear himself in the face of all circumstances?

Answer: He dies to himself, and with him die all things.

Question: What is his attitude to time?

Answer: He is in a present 'Now', without self-seeking aims, and he profits by the smallest as well as by the greatest of things.

Question: Paul says that to the righteous no law is given.¹

Answer: A righteous man, in so far as he is righteous, is more submissive than other men, for he understands in his inward ground what is fitting for everyone from without. But the reason why he has no bonds is because he does from self-abandonment what the crowd does from compulsion.

Question: The man who is raised to inner abandonment, is he not exempted from outer exercises?

Answer: One sees few men attain the point of which thou speakest, for the effort required searches out the very marrow of the bones of those on whom it is really bestowed. Hence, when they know what is to be done or left undone, they keep to ordinary exercises, more or less, according to their strength and according to the circumstances.

Question: Whence come the great distress and extreme constraint that afflict some apparently good men, and which they

¹ 1 Timothy i, 9.

have on their conscience, and on the other hand the inordinate latitude of some other men?¹

Answer: They both aim at their own image,² but differently: the former spiritually, the others physically.

Question: Is such a man³ always idle, or what is his activity?

Answer: The actions of a truly abandoned man are his inaction, and his work is to be inactive, for in his actions he remains at rest, and in his work he remains at leisure.

Question: How does he bear himself towards his neighbour?

Answer: He has the society of people without images,⁴ and love without ties, sympathy without cares, all in true freedom.

Question: Is such a man under any obligation to go to confession?

Answer: The confession that takes place through love is nobler than that which proceeds from obligation.⁵

Question: What are the prayers of such a man like?

Answer: His prayers are fruitful, for he withdraws into himself because God is a spirit;⁶ and he observes whether there is any obstacle between God and himself, or whether he is still led in any way by his own self. And then a light is shown in the highest power of his mind, with the revelation that God is being, life and activity in him, and that he is only the instrument of this.

Question: What is the nature of such a man's eating and drinking?

Answer: Outwardly and physically the outer man eats, but after the voice has spoken within him, he does not eat;⁷ otherwise he would use the food and rest as animals do. And so it is also in other matters that pertain to man.

Question: What is his outward behaviour like?

Answer: He has few words or gestures; and they are simple and unassuming. He leads a moral life, so that things flow

¹ Lax persons, whose consciences are not active.

² They are still bound by self, and have not abandoned themselves to God.

³ A self-abandoned man.

⁴ Without receiving the imprint of things on his mind.

⁵ As a mere matter of habit.

⁶ St. John iv, 24.

⁷ He eats and drinks, but without obtaining pleasure from so doing.

through him without his perceiving them, and he is calm in his mind.

Question: Are they all like this?

Answer: More or less, according to their differing natures; but the essential point remains the same.

Question: Has such a man arrived at a complete knowledge of the truth, or does he still have imaginings and ideas?

Answer: When a man remains in himself, the imaginings and ideas remain in him, but when he dies to himself, and has passed into Him who is,¹ in whom is knowledge of all truth, since He is the very truth, then he remains in the truth, and is dead to himself.

Let this suffice for thee, for one does not attain it by asking questions; but it is by true self-abandonment that one comes to this hidden truth.

¹ Exodus iii, 14.

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